ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ner of the
00 first prize
this issue

Cents

Number 53

ce Has No Number — ALFREDO SEGRE
($3000 Prize Winner in EQMM's Short-Story Contest)
of the Overheated Flat — ERIC AMBLER
Five of Swords — G. K. CHESTERTON
Snout — EDWARD LUCAS WHITE
en In a Room — CHARLES FRANCIS COE
Mystery of the Seven Suicides — T. S. STRIBLING
h on the Offbeat — JOHN WIGGIN
k Max — OCTAVUS ROY COHEN
Witness — PERCIVAL WILDE
Scarecrow Murder — A. E. MARTIN
Adventures of Karmesin — GERALD KERSH

HOW TO WIN $100.....See page 64

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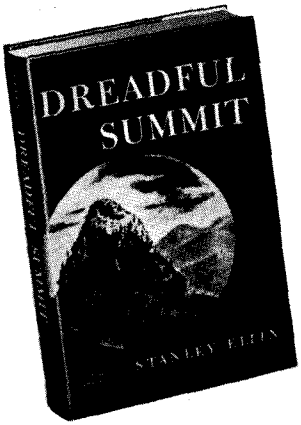

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Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, *EQMM* will award a Second Prize of $1,000, four (4) Third Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Fourth Prizes of $250 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at *EQMM*'s regular rates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1948.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1948. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1949.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $25 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

8. Every care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

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TRIENNIAL REPORT ON EQMM's PRIZE CONTESTS

by ELLERY QUEEN

I. *The Dark Horse in the Smoke-Filled Room*

Many readers of *EQMM* — and to be absolutely truthful, most reviewers — have disagreed with some of the critical decisions made by our Board of Judges. The most important disagreement spotlighted the two previous selections for First Prize. In the opinion of "our best friends and severest critics," we awarded First Prize either to a story which was not good enough to merit so high an honor, or we made the mistake of giving a lesser prize to a story which really did deserve the highest award. Of course, we could paraphrase the immortal words of Abraham Lincoln by reminding readers and reviewers that we can satisfy all the people some of the time, we can even satisfy some of the people all the time, but by the shade of Sherrington Hope we can't satisfy all of the people all the time!

Such a defense, however, would leave too much unexplained. Your Editor believes that he can safely take the readers of *EQMM* into his confidence by revealing some of the problems and pressures, the headaches and heartaches, of trying to pick the best manuscript out of hundreds and hundreds of entries. In telling you this inside story we are perhaps violating one of the unwritten laws of editorship. If so, so be it: we have set precedents before in developing a new relationship between editor and reader and we shall probably go right on being an iconoclast till they shovel us under.

First, then, let us travel back in time to *EQMM's* first contest, which ran during 1945, with the winning stories published during 1946. All told, we received 838 submissions. Every single one of these 838 manuscripts was read clear through and given the most careful critical study. After the initial weeding out we found ourselves with 16 possible prize-winners. Despite the fact that we had guaranteed only 7 prizes, we decided to purchase all 16 finalists, and all were eventually published — in *EQMM* and in THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1946.

On the night before our deadline, after months of weighing, analyzing, and eliminating, the judges met in final conclave. Anticipating a possible controversy on the selection of the First Prize winner, your Editor asked two other people to sit in. These two extra judges were chosen

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with hairline discrimination. One was, and still is, a fiction reader for a national magazine, and the other was, and still is, one of the best-selling authors of all time.

We met early in the evening and discussed the 16 finalists at great length. Toward midnight we began voting, and gradually we reduced the 16 possibilities — first, from 16 to 11; then, from 11 to 7; finally, from 7 to 5. At this point in our deliberations we paused for refreshment (this is a factual report). It was now past midnight and it had been a grueling session. Then, feeling like members of a jury, we cast our final votes for the First Prize winner, each of the judges nominating the one story which he considered the very best of the surviving 5. It had been agreed that the story which received the largest number of votes in this final balloting would be awarded First Prize.

Can you guess what happened? No? Then listen: each of the five judges voted for a different story! All five finalists got one vote each! It was a quintuple stalemate!

What happened after that shouldn't happen to an editor. We passed through various stages, each stage becoming more dangerous. First, we defended our own choices — calmly. Next, we tried to influence the others' votes — excitedly. In the end, we attacked each other's judgment — vehemently. Time and again we put our standstill to another vote, and every time it came out the same way: each judge stuck to his original selection. It was getting later and later, and we were getting nowhere slowly. Obviously, we just had to sweat it out, continue cracking our brains, until a satisfying — and we hoped unanimous — decision could be reached.

At thirteen o'clock your Editor remembered an old political maneuver.

We made a proposition to the other four judges. Since no one was willing to budge from his original choice, suppose we considered a "dark horse." Suppose there was another story — a sixth story, previously eliminated from first-prize consideration — which we all agreed possessed at least two outstanding virtues — virtues, moreover, that none of the five finalists could boast. Would the other judges unanimously agree to this story as their alternate choice and then award First Prize to their unanimous alternate choice?

Yes, they would consider such a course, but what story did your Editor have in mind? We suggested Manly Wade Wellman's *A Star for a Warrior*, pointing out that from two standpoints it was the most original story submitted. You will recall that *A Star for a Warrior* presented a new type of detective character — a full-blooded American Indian — and that this government-trained agency policeman solved a murder on an Indian reservation, using not only his modern training but his deep understanding of Indian character, tradition, and ceremonials.

The judges agreed that if they

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could not have their original choices, they would all pitch for the Wellman tale, amen. You think we were wrong? You think no contest should be decided that way? Well, put yourself in the judges' shoes. If we hadn't found one story *that we all agreed on*, we would either still be in session or we would have had to declare the whole contest a mistrial — both eventualities obviously impossible. And we repeat: for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, the five judges were unanimous in their final decision.

II. *The Horns of the Dilemma*

The second annual contest seemed to work out more smoothly. Seemed to. Entries were received throughout 1946 and the winning stories were published in 1947. The quantity of the submissions went down, the average of quality went up. In the second contest 623 manuscripts were given the most scrupulous editorial consideration. Our staff readers and your Editor sifted and evaluated until we had reduced the 623 stories to 18 prize-winning possibilities. Again we decided to buy all 18 finalists, and all 18 appeared both in *EQMM* and in THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1947.

But this year two stories of the 18 stood out with unmistakable prominence. The judges discussed these two finalists pro and con, backwards and forwards, taking one thing with another, until we almost knew those two stories by heart. The two stories seemed so even in all-around excellence, so equal in individual distinction, that we were faced with a class instance of six-of-one and half-dozen-of-another. In the end it was purely a matter of personal opinion — that highly debatable argument! — which tipped the scales. The judges unanimously agreed that H. F. Heard's *The President of the United States, Detective* had the edge.

This would have normally relegated the nosed-out story, Carter Dickson's *The House in Goblin Wood*, to the Second Prize group; but since there had been a veritable photo-finish the judges decided to create a special prize for the loser. We gave the Carter Dickson story a Special Award of Merit, which in dollars and cents amounted to double the Second Prize money. Yet, despite the enormous care and patience and thoroughness with which our final decision was made and despite the extra monetary award we gave the loser, many readers — and to be absolutely truthful again, most reviewers — caviled sharply with the judges and criticized them for not having awarded First Prize to the Carter Dickson story.

So, the pattern persists: the judges are wrong, long live the judges!

But of all the thankless tasks invented by the human brain, we defy you to name one that beats being a literary judge and a detective-story editor.

III. *Unholy Deadlock*

And so we come to *EQMM's* third contest, on which we are now reporting. We are tempted to paraphrase

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ain, this time the words of Dr. Watson, of beloved memory: It is ith a heavy heart that we sit before ir typewriter andsoforth. For all iree contests to date, surely the test one gave the judges their most olossal headache, their most sustained somnia, and their most spastic-olonic distress.

The manuscripts for Contest Num-r Three rolled in throughout 1947, aching a highwater mark of pleni-ude. No less than 862 entries came y land, by sea, and by air to our al-ady battle-scarred desks. As always, e read every submission to the last ord, and by dint of burning electric-y in the blind alleys of the night we ore that mountain of manuscripts own to a shadow of its original agnitude. The 862 submissions shrank 25 prize-winning possibilities, and ain we splurged: although we have nsistently guaranteed only 7 prizes, ch year we have just as consistently ought all the finalists. The first year e purchased 16 stories, the second ar 18 stories, and last year our rizes and purchases reached their ighwater mark — we bought all 25 ories; they will appear in *EQMM* roughout 1948, and 16 of them will ecome THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1948.

So, as before, the judges had a mple chore: all we had to do was to ick the best story out of 25 — and a retty kettle-of fish this turned out be. It was not too difficult to liminate 9 of the 25, and these 9 ere promptly designated as Honor-ble Mentions. That left 16. Of these we selected another 9 for Special Prizes, reducing to 7 our possibilities for First Prize. Not bad, eh? We were obviously making splendid progress toward our annual goal, and the fact that the finalists boiled down to 7 seemed a good omen. Not only is 7 an admittedly lucky number, but 7 finalists fitted perfectly with our needs — one First Prize and six Second Prizes. The only fly in the ointment was to select the best story of the 7. But what a fly! It proved to be the size of a camel.

Well, we winnowed those 7 down to 3 — and there we stuck. If we told you how many times we met to re-analyze, reappraise, and reconsider those three stories, you simply wouldn't believe it: truth is often stranger than fiction but this time it was fantastic. And we could not, for the life of us, agree which of the three stories was better, all around, than the other two. Each story had virtues to recommend it; on the other hand, each story had faults or shortcomings which prevented it from being spontaneously voted the First Prize winner.

We weighed and we balanced; we dissected and we compared; and we did what judges are expected to do — we judged. But in all honesty we could not reach a decision satisfying to us all. So, in desperation, we asked the writers of the three stories to do some more rewriting and polishing and sharpening, and then, in final desperation, we took the three re-written versions and subjected them to an arbitrary point system. The

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judges reexamined each story, putting down one point for each virtue, and deducting one point for each frailty or defect. The story with the highest number of net points would be declared winner of the First Prize — and may our best-friends-and-severest-critics have mercy on our souls, amen.

You think we're discouraged? We are not! And to prove it we offer this toast: Here's to crime and detection and mystery in their most enjoyable form — the short story — and above all, here's to *EQMM's* Fourth Annual Detective Story Contest. Yes, the next contest is hereby proclaimed as on again. *EQMM's* Fourth Annual Prize Contest will close October 20, 1948, and winners will be publicized and prizes awarded by Christmas 1948. O, come all ye faithful . . .

IV. *All the World Loves a Detective Story*

The outstanding development of the second annual contest was the rise both in quantity and quality of stories submitted by beginners, to such a degree that 'tec tyros walked off with three Special Prizes. This trend, we are happy to report, has continued, and it augurs well for the future. But the third contest produced an even more startling development: for the first time *EQMM's* Annual Contest achieved true international stature. It is now, in the fullest meaning of the phrase, a World-Wide Detective Story Prize Contest.

The number of stories sent in from foreign countries and the range geographical representation were tru remarkable. Although men of goo will are still fighting for life ar liberty in some parts of the worl they are finding time (such is huma nature) to recapture the most peac ful of peacetime pursuits — the pu suit of happiness. While we have long way to go politically, the plan Earth is proving itself to be O World detective-storywise. May t bickering, bargaining statesmen the world heed the example set b detective-story writers!

In the first contest we receiv stories from the United States, Alask Mexico, England, New Zealan Union of South Africa, Australi France, Germany, Italy, Austri Brazil, and Argentina. In the se ond contest stories emanated fro the United States, Alaska, Mexic Canada, England, Union of Sou Africa, Australia, France, German Netherlands, and Algeria. As you se we lost some outposts of contributio in the second contest, but gain others; the first two contests woun up fairly even on foreign submi sions.

But the third contest! Last ye we hit the jack-pot on foreign storie All six continents sent their emi saries of good will. From Nort America we received entries pos marked the United States, Alask Canada, Mexico, Canal Zone, an Dominican Republic. South Ameri was represented by stories fro Brazil and Argentina. Asia came t

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life (General MacArthur's influence?) with submissions from Japan, China, and the Philippines. Australia again answered the 'tec tocsin. From Africa came stories postmarked Union of South Africa, Algeria, and Southern Rhodesia. And from Europe we welcomed manuscripts that were originally written in England, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal.

To celebrate this United Nations effort we are planning to devote an entire issue of *EQMM* to the international aspects of the detective story, past and present. This UN issue will be dated August 1948, on sale early in July 1948. It will contain prize stories and other new stories from Australia, Argentina, South Africa, Italy, Portugal, and the Philippines, and older stories from the United States, Canada, England, Belgium, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and if space permits, France and Spain.

Hail, brothers-of-the-blood all over the world!

V. *The Winners and New Champions*

And now for the 25 winning stories in *EQMM's* Third Annual Contest . . . You will find nearly every type of detective-crime-mystery short story in this year's roster. The two all-inclusive forms are amply represented — the sensational and the intellectual, and expert blendings of both forks of development. If you want excitement and action, they are yours for the reading — as are stories offering keen mental stimulation and quiet entertainment. You will find nearly every type of detective, professional and amateur, male and female, hardboiled and softboiled, and at least three variations that will be brand-new to you. You will find the orthodox and the unorthodox, formula and nonformula . . . riddles solved and riddles unsolved . . . the locked room and the impossible crime . . . the perfect crime and the imperfect crime . . . tough, two-fisted capers and subtle, secretive shenanigans . . . stories of suspense, horror, and surprise . . . stories with philosophic overtones . . . physical, psychological, and psychiatric detection . . . a new kind of Watson and a new kind of Sherlockiana . . . skullduggery and roguery and sleuthery . . . burlesque and 'tec tomfoolery . . . stories of official police procedure and stories of unofficial private inquiry . . . stories so photographically real that you will doubt they are fiction and stories so imaginary that you will doubt they could ever happen . . . stories told from the detective's viewpoint, from the criminal's viewpoint, from the reader's viewpoint . . . stories told straightforwardly and stories told in reverse . . . stories with emphasis on character, mood, and background and stories of sheer plot and sequence of events . . . stories of impersonation, doublecross, frustration, greed, fear, charlatanism, revenge, passion . . . in a phrase, the stuff as crime and detection are made on . . . and here they are:

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FIRST PRIZE

Justice Has No Number by Alfredo Segre

SECOND PRIZES

From Another World by Clayton Rawson
(the first short story about the Great Merlini)
The Green-and-Gold String by Philip MacDonald
Mother, May I Go Out to Swim? by Q. Patrick
The Fourth Degree by Hugh Pentecost
(the first short story about Dr. John Smith)
Through a Glass, Darkly by Helen McCloy
(the first short story about Dr. Basil Willing)
Extradition by Brett Halliday

SPECIAL PRIZE FOR THE BEST FIRST STORY

The Specialty of the House by Stanley Ellin

SPECIAL PRIZE FOR THE BEST SHERLOCKIANA

The Adventure of the Single Footprint by Robert Arthur

SPECIAL PRIZE FOR THE BEST STORY BY A COLLEGE STUDENT

The Silver Dollar by Rink Creussen (Princeton)

SPECIAL PRIZE FOR THE BEST TOUR DE FORCE

The Lady and the Tiger by Jack Moffitt

SPECIAL PRIZES FOR THE BEST FOREIGN STORIES

Australia
The Power of the Leaf by A. E. Martin
Argentina
The Garden of Forking Paths by Jorge Luis Borges
South Africa
Being a Murderer Myself by Arthur Williams
Portugal
The Maul, the Sword, and the Sharp Arrow by Victor Palla
Philippines
Fourth Rule for Murderers by H. T. Alfon

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HONORABLE MENTIONS

Death Sentence	by Miriam Allen deFord
The Tontine Curse	by Lillian de la Torre
The Death Position Enigma	by Roy Vickers
Crime Lesson	by Dale Clark
A Case of Facsimile	by Viola Brothers Shore
The Mystery of the Seven Suicides	by T. S. Stribling
Dear Louisa	by Miriam Bruce
Salt on His Tail	by Leslie Charteris
Corollary	by Hughes Allison

Consider the titles: They are like magical incantations — and indeed who among you will deny that detective stories are the fairy tales of our modern world? Fairy tales for grown-ups . . .

(The preceding paragraph was written by your Editor on December 23, 1947. Seventeen days later, on January 9, 1948, the Baker Street Irregulars held their annual meeting at the Racquet and Tennis Club, New York City, and during the course of this conanical assembly, Edgar W. Smith, Buttons-Cum-Commissionaire of the parent organization, read excerpts from Vincent Starrett's still-unpublished Introduction to the first Sherlock Holmes volume of the Limited Editions Club. Imagine your Editor's amazement and chagrin when we heard the same fairy-tale thought expressed by Vincent Starrett in, if we recall correctly, almost the identical words. Our first impulse was to delete our own paragraph from this report. But first impulses often yield to second thoughts. So, on reconsideration, we decided to let the paragraph stand as originally written and merely add these parenthetical remarks proving once again that truly affinitive minds run in the same criminological channels.)

VI. *The Way to a Fan's Heart*

It has just occurred to us that in a manner of speaking we are restaurateurs — purveyors of criminous cold cuts and detective delicacies. For steady subscribers of *EQMM* we are strictly 'tec table d'hôte; for occasional readers our service is crime à la carte.

The prize-winning stories of Contest Number One represented a 15-course feast — a feast of ferreting, stuffed with tasty clues and savory deductions. Before each course, you will recall, we handed you a long apèritif consisting of equal parts of your Editor-in-Chef's personal opinions on the form, technique, and history of the detective story, spiked with dashes of 'tec trivia.

For the prize-winning stories of Contest Number Two we changed the menu. That year we gave you an 18-

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course banquet whose bill of fare included your choice of potage à la private-eye, roast à la rogue, or bouillabaisse à la bloodhound. And preceding each course this time we offered you dainty hors-d'oeuvres composed of biographical and bibliographical tidbits on the prize-winning authors, and after each course, postprandial nuts (or cheese, if you prefer) which pan-fried the plots and counterplots of the prize-winning stories themselves.

To be absolutely truthful once again, this criminological cookery was also criticized — one man's meat is still another man's poison. For example, John Hersey, in what was probably his first attempt to review detective stories, found our cuisine not entirely to his taste. Among other things, Mr. Hersey accused your Editor-in-Chef "of maintaining a strong promotional tone in favor of the profession."

Well, there's an old saying among cooks and crooks that the customer is always right. So again we'll change our culinary style. No more felonious fricassee after your Editor-in-Chef's own recipe. This year's prize-winning stories will not, for the most part, be flavored with our own editorial sauce. This year we will serve you the ideas and thoughts of the prize-winning authors themselves — the spicy and salty facts of how the prize stories came to be concocted, where the authors got their ingredients, what 'tec taste-buds the authors were trying to appeal to — a different kind of cook's tour behind the scenes of the modern detective story.

Eat hearty!

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WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE: ALFREDO SEGRE

Alfredo Segre was born in Turin, Italy, in 1908. He has written two books. The first won an Italian National Contest for a Novel, in 1933 — the contest was known as the Mondadori Academy Award. A translation of the second book, titled MAHOGANY, *was published in New York City by L. B. Fischer in 1944. "Esquire" printed one of Mr. Segre's short stories in 1941, and "The Musical Quarterly" published in its April 1947 issue a long article by Mr. Segre on the first forty years in the life of Arturo Toscanini. In 1943 Mr. Segre was assistant chief in the Overseas Branch of the OWI; then he joined the U. S. Army and was sent to Italy where he spent two years with the 175th Engineer Regiment, attached to the Fifth Army. He was made an American citizen on the field, in July 1944.*

His prize-winning story was born under interesting circumstances. One morning in the summer of 1946, while on his way to work in New York City, Mr. Segre began thinking of the time when, as a boy, he lived in a small Italian town. One of his most vivid childhood memories was the finding of a beheaded man on the railway embankment. Association of ideas — stream of subconsciousness — connected this episode of his boyhood with more recent episodes of his manhood: the sights and sounds and smells of the dead in the Italian campaign. Then there loomed in his memory the remembrance of the living — the Italian peasants, the landowners, the officials.

Mr. Segre confesses that he has no particular love for writing — or to put it more exactly, writing has always been a painful task for him. He prefers to think rather than to write — to think over people and events, to re-experience them within himself and talk about them to his friends. But slowly these thinking and talking processes — the gestation of creative writing — began to shape a story, and at the insistence of his friends Mr. Segre finally committed his thoughts and memories to paper. It took him a long time to choose and discard, and ultimately decide on those elements which he felt were really significant. It is a matter of impressive fact that "Justice Has No Number" — less than 10,000 words in length — was three full months in the writing.

The paradox of Mr. Segre's theories on writing is the paradox of every creative artist. Mr. Segre does not believe it is possible to live life by closing one's self up in a room with pen and paper, while life itself flows

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along outside the windows. Mr. Segre spent his adolescence in the streets of a small Italian town, and on the beaches. At sixteen he was sailing fishing boats; at eighteen he was in West Africa, working with monkey-skin traders and cacao exporters; from 1928 to 1936 he roamed through Egypt, Uganda, Transvaal, Norway, and Greece; in 1939 he was living in France; at the time of this writing he is living in a New York City basement which he describes as "a very sad place."

Mr. Segre's prize-winning story never strays from the path of real life. Yes, there is imagination in it too, but it is the imagination which stems from sensitive observation and from the awareness of never-changing truths. The detective in "Justice Has No Number" is a little man of the world — the forgotten man, the man of deepest good will, the man who is one of the blessed millions whose atomic-meekness shall some day inherit the earth. Yes, as men go Bastia is a little fellow — a simple, unassuming organ-grinder of present-day Italy — and his colleague, Pasqualino, is an even smaller being. You will find in Pasqualino a kind of Watson brand-new to detective fiction; he knows only one word of speech but it is the almighty word, the right word. But even more important, you will find in the little hurdy-gurdy man a detective character seldom found in the pure detective story — a human being who projects warmth, kindness, understanding, and most of all, a compassion for his fellowmen and a passion for justice. . . .

JUSTICE HAS NO NUMBER

by ALFREDO SEGRE

BASTIA scrambled back up the embankment and pulled his hurdy-gurdy off the road, setting one wheel firmly in the ditch. Then, carefully carrying the cage in which Pasqualino was napping, he started down the slope once again, toward the bushes where he had first seen the blackberries shining in the sun. There, behind the bushes, he had found the body of a man. The sight would have been a shocking one had it not been for the war which was still going on up North and which had accustomed him to seeing bodies scattered around everywhere. He squatted down on the grass and emptied his pockets of all the berries he had picked. Pasqualino began to groan because the sun hit him right in the eyes, but Bastia paid no attention. He had even forgotten to be hungry, staring at the body, not frightened, but somehow fascinated, as if he had been called to share a secret, with some strange force guiding his steps down the embankment

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and then around the bushes. The fact that the man was dead, and that he was an utter stranger, sharpened his curiosity. Finally, he said to himself: I will call him Luigi. Then he felt more at ease and swallowed a handful of berries.

That Luigi was young, of that there was no doubt — his calves were strong and full. That he had been dead only for a short time was equally clear — there was no stench, just the faint odor of a butcher shop early in the morning. But more than that was hard to know, and yet he should know, because there was a reason for everything; the berries had shone in the sun and he had been hungry just so that he could meet Luigi sprawled behind the bushes, before the police could intrude on his secret. The police!

He hated the police, the guards, and the *carabinieri*. Time and again they had made him sleep in jail, the hurdy-gurdy rusting in the rain, just to question him about things that had happened along the road. Let the police beat out their brains trying to find out who the man was: the body had no head.

"They will go and dig in some faraway cemetery," Bastia said, turning to Pasqualino.

"Why?" Pasqualino asked, lifting one claw and swaying a little.

"Because the police must have a head, any head, to show they know everything."

"Why?" repeated Pasqualino; and he spread his toes wide upon the perch and then cramped them together like the leaves of an artichoke, still swaying with that air of nonchalant understanding which Bastia loved like a subtle tickling.

"Because the *commissario* is a lawyer."

"Why?" Pasqualino went on, shifting onto the other leg.

"It's difficult to explain," said Bastia, trying to think of the answer. But Pasqualino got excited and asked why five or six times in succession.

"Because you are a parrot, shut up!" said Bastia; and he shook the cage until Pasqualino lost his grip and retreated between the water cup and the box where the fortune cards were stacked up.

Bastia moved nearer to the body. A parade of faces kept bouncing up; some of them fitted nicely onto the strong neck, others were too small and stood up funny, like the hook on a hanger. Whom did he know who had such broad shoulders? He cast a glance at the distant hills where the towns struggled to stand upright. He mumbled their names, and at each name he sorted out two, three, even five dubious characters whose shoulders were broad. To thin the confusion, he began anew, starting with the town of Monticello, the nearest one. There lived Stefo, a thief, and Vincenzo, who prowled around the houses from which the men had been shipped to Germany. Suppose Stefo had been caught at night stealing the few rabbits, or a husband had come back all of a sudden and bumped into Vin-

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cenzo creeping into the bedroom.

Bastia stared again at the headless body and shrugged his shoulders: to cut off a man's head meant that the murderer must have hated him for a long time, and both Stefo and Vincenzo were such petty offenders that the people of Monticello accepted them with tolerance, especially now that things all around were so much worse. And besides, Stefo and Vincenzo had never worn boots.

Bastia's eyes slid along the hills and stopped at the whitish spot of Castelnuovo. First he thought of Don Marco, the landowner and Mayor, who lived in a big house, half farm and half villa, and who once had told him to find a job that would be more decent than grinding a hurdy-gurdy. The thought of the Mayor brought back the thought of the police. It would be better to keep going, because if the patrol caught him here, the first thing they'd do would be to shove him into the rotten dampness of a cell and call him a suspect. Still he hesitated: this Luigi was so helpless without a head that he felt an impulse of friendship. So he said aloud: "I'd like to take care of you, believe me, Luigi," and he wished he had a piece of gauze to lay over his neck, like on a slice of watermelon, to keep the flies away — those green flies which cluster wherever there is something open and about to spoil. He looked at the boots, and then at his own feet. "I'll let you keep them," he said, shoving a handful of berries into his mouth, "because you are my friend. Now we must go," he added, turning to Pasqualino.

Bastia gave a last look at the body. Suddenly he grabbed the cage and whispered to the parrot: "You see, the grass is green, green and clean."

"Why?" asked Pasqualino.

"That's the point," Bastia answered, starting slowly up the embankment.

At the approaches to Monticello he almost decided to skirt the town and go right on to the next one, four miles away. Monticello was too near to the body, Monticello had a carabinieri station, and behind his back he could sense a net being dragged over the road and beyond the road and catching stones, posts, berries, and the headless body and finally his hurdy-gurdy, and dumping everything into jail. But this was Friday. On Fridays he always visited Monticello; the townsfolk waited for him so they could buy the fortune cards and play the numbers at the weekly lottery. He could easily make fifty lire and eat a decent meal. With the meal he thought of a bottle of wine, and he pulled hard along the uphill street which led into Monticello's main square.

He stopped by the fountain, filled Pasqualino's cup, and showed him a handful of dried chestnuts, which was Pasqualino's pay for picking out a card and offering it to the customer. By the shadow of the lamp post he reckoned it was almost eight o'clock. A few minutes later the bells began

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to call for the second mass. He wound up the hurdy-gurdy and turned the pointer to a mazurka, glancing at the wine shop which was still closed, and then at the black hole of the post office which accepted lottery numbers and gave receipts for them. On the point of letting the music pour out, he reminded himself that it would irk the priest. The priest was the ecclesiastic authority. Every town had authorities who were only too glad to bawl out a man with a hurdy-gurdy. Once Bastia had dreamed of putting all the authorities together and letting them starve because there would be no peasants to grow food for them. And he would then play a mazurka for them.

After half an hour he grew impatient. His feet were burning and wine could make the heat even all over. He counted his money again. In his pocket he mashed a couple of berries and, his mind went back to the murdered man and his eyes looked for the carabinieri station. Suddenly he realized that except for the killer he was the only one who knew about the crime.

"I have been chosen," he said to Pasqualino in a whisper.

"Why?"

"Because I'm the only one who's going to play the right numbers of the cabala."

Besides selling cards with personal advice and lucky numbers printed on them, Bastia kept the cabala for the use of his customers. The cabala was a book which had on its cover the picture of a blindfolded girl stretched out on a golden quilt. Everything that existed, everything that could possibly happen or that could be dreamt of in the world, was listed there with its number. But since the numbers of the weekly lottery were only the first ninety, and since the things, the facts, and the dreams in the world were many more, each number in the cabala had several meanings. Bastia had studied them for years until he had memorized them all, and often he would impress the townsfolk by saying: "Remember that the harvest, the coffin, the skylark, and the pregnant woman have the same number," and then he would take the book and show that he never made a mistake.

He closed his eyes to conceal the numbers popping about inside his head. 84, which corresponded to *Man Beheaded*, appeared in a luminous halo. He was a little bit upset: that halo smelled of religion, and no saints had ever protected him. But then, Luigi wasn't a martyr; he had lost his head in some unsaintly way. Finally, he solved it by accepting Luigi as his personal friend and the halo around 84 took on a special meaning of privilege. That was a sure number. Still he had to guess the other two, because guessing three numbers correctly out of the five which were drawn every Saturday in the lottery at Rome meant winning three thousand five hundred times the stake. . . . Suppose I sell fifty lire's worth of fortune cards, I'll go and play the whole amount. . . . Three thousand

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five hundred times fifty is. . . . No figures came into his mind — he only saw a bed, and under the bed a jug of wine . . . 84 is a sure number. . . . Christ was crucified for all men, Luigi was beheaded for me alone. . . . I must find the other two numbers, and there is a lot to work out, starting with the berries, and the day which is Friday, and the crime without blood. . . .

He kept studying the numbers and the circumstances and the constellation of the month of May, and the association of the Moon with Uranus, which always brought unforseeable events; and in the meantime he pulled his hurdy-gurdy to the front of the church, watching the two doors that opened softly and let people out without any warning. At about nine o'clock five or six women came out, folded their black kerchiefs, and gathered around the hurdy-gurdy.

"I had a dream," one of them said. "Will you explain it to me?"

"Tell the beast to pick a lucky card for me," said another, holding out a two-lire bill.

"He's not a beast," Bastia grunted; and he showed Pasqualino the chestnuts. Pasqualino quickly thrust his beak among the leaflets.

"This advice is for a young girl," the woman complained.

"Pasqualino thinks you are young — parrots are used to living three hundred years," Bastia replied, grabbing the two-lire bill.

"In my dream I saw two baskets full of eggs."

The church door opened noiselessly and a man slid out. Bastia caught his quick turn to the left of the stairs and noted that he walked awkwardly.

"Was he at confession?" he asked one of the women. At that moment the man turned into a narrow street. "Do me a favor, watch my stuff, I'll be back in a minute," Bastia said hurriedly, "and don't fool around with Pasqualino, he pecks hard. . . . Two baskets full of eggs is 2 for the baskets, 21 for eggs, and 33 for hunger. . . ."

He ran through the square and walked into the narrow street. The man was fifty yards ahead of him. On his way to Monticello the man had certainly cut across the fields, because there were briars stuck to the cuffs of his trousers. Bastia quickened his pace. "He must have gone to pick blackberries just after I did," he said to himself, "then he went to confession." He was on the point of calling to him, but instead, a few yards away, he walked on tip-toe and suddenly caught up to him, slightly grazing his elbow. The man jerked, but Bastia continued to stare at the ground, keeping just abreast of him, swaying toward the ditch when the man swayed and measuring every step to his step. In a few seconds the man began to pant and then to cough. Bastia didn't raise his head, but all at once he stepped hard on the man's foot, and with the weight of his body shoved him against a mound of gravel. There the man sat down and with trembling hands took off his boots; then he stood up, jumped into the

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ditch, climbed over the other side of it and started to run across the fields.

Bastia took off his jacket, picked up the boots and wrapped them in it, and with the bundle under his arm, walked back to the town.

When the women finally left with their dreams and their cards, Bastia gave Pasqualino his chestnuts and said angrily: "Men are cowards and imbeciles."

But Pasqualino didn't ask why, because he was busily using his beak and claws to peel his fruits, and Bastia felt disappointed. Pasqualino was his only partner, the only one who was always interested in hearing his opinions. That Pasqualino questioned him with unending why's was not an accident. Bastia had experienced the why's set forth by the police and had found out that every answer to them almost always turned out somehow to be a confession of guilt. Therefore, he had learned to keep his mouth shut with the police and had taught the parrot the word — the almighty word.

"Men are cowards and imbeciles," Bastia repeated, when the last chestnut was swallowed. This time Pasqualino asked a soft why, and Bastia smiled: "Because they would steal a pair of boots from a living man who needed them and be proud of it; but when they steal them from a dead man who doesn't give a damn, then they are scared. And now let's go and get a glass of wine."

He pushed the hurdy-gurdy to the wine shop, went inside, and sat down.

The owner hastened to inform him that the price of a glass of wine was ten lire. "Everything is getting expensive," he commented, wiping the glass and setting it down on the table.

Bastia put a five-lire bill and a fortune card on the tray, and quickly gulped the wine.

"At least you could give out good numbers," grumbled the owner. "You remember when the airplanes dropped those bombs?"

"I remember: 14 bombs, 6 airplanes, 17 dead, and Salvatore's dog jumping on three legs. . . ."

"You gave out the wrong numbers — they never came out."

"I told the people that nothing right can come out of a war. Good numbers want justice. . . ."

"You know," said the owner of the wine shop, "no one understands you?"

Bastia pressed his hands to his forehead, to squeeze out the two other numbers which, with 84, would give him three thousand five hundred times fifty lire. It was hard to choose, his brain was getting numb. For example, take 35 — *blackberries*. It was true that the blackberries had led him to the discovery of the beheaded body; but still, should more value be attributed to the things *around* a crime or to the things *inside* a crime? And which were the things inside the crime? Take another example: *death without blood* was 49 in the cabala, but who knew the number for a bloodless wound? The grass was green, not a drop had fallen from the big

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gash in Luigi's neck. Bastia's face became all wrinkled: from somewhere a thought had crept under his forehead and reaching his eyes had changed swiftly into an image: a hog, hanging by the feet from the wall of a slaughter house. There was no doubt: in no other way could Luigi's body have been emptied of blood. This was butchering. And the number for *butchering* was 14.

"You're always talking to yourself," the owner said from behind the counter. "Do you understand yourself?"

But Bastia had already left. He was pulling the hurdy-gurdy across the square, watching the open windows of the carabinieri station. Everything was quiet. The wife of the *brigadiere* was setting the table on the second floor; in the courtyard there were bicycles chained to the gate. All this meant that the news of the crime had not yet reached Monticello.

Inside the post office where they took the numbers and gave receipts for the weekly lottery, Bastia leaned against the wall. He was unhappy. He knew that everything in the world was numbers, but he knew also that numbers had rules like the stars, that they grouped together because of certain attractions which were hard to detect. He touched the bills wadded up in his pocket. 84 and 14 . . . he didn't believe in them . . . they were easy, they might be good enough for the townsfolk who could only grasp the appearances of facts. No, he should wait, 84 and 14 lacked the link between them, the third number — the reason for the crime.

As he turned toward the door, a man with a gray hat walked straight over to the counter and said something to the clerk. Bastia noticed that his accent was thick — he must be one of the Southerners who had fled when Sicily was first invaded. He lingered on the threshold and waited curiously to hear his words. But instead he heard the post office clerk ask: "Did you say 84 and 14?"

"And 72," said the man, leaning over the counter.

Bastia pushed his hurdy-gurdy off the road till one wheel sat firmly in the ditch, locked the drawer into which he had stuffed Luigi's boots, and taking the parrot with him he slowly started down the slope.

The women were lined up on one side, the men opposite them, all of them behind the Mayor, the brigadiere, and the carabinieri. In the middle was Luigi's body. The odor was stronger — the flesh had begun to cook. Bastia crouched on the ground, in back of the black skirts, and screened Pasqualino's cage with the front of his jacket. He had the clear feeling that the world of stars and numbers was present in the order with which everything around him had grouped together. The people were silent. They seemed to be one with the murdered man, maybe because he was pitiful, maybe because they thought he had been a good fellow. This was one group, a universe

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eclipsed by pity. Then there was a second group, and it was like two planets circling around Luigi's body. The first planet was the man who had stolen Luigi's boots. Its light was pale, made of tremors of fear. The second planet was the man who had played 84, 14, and 72. It gave no light.

"Can you explain to me why this body happens to be on your property?" the brigadiere asked the man who had stolen the boots. There was no answer. The Mayor whispered into the ear of the brigadiere, two carabinieri stepped to his side, then they sandwiched the man in between them and all three walked toward the town.

The authorities formed the third group. They were rings around a crime.

"We should have an ambulance to take it to the cemetery," the Mayor remarked.

"First I'd like a picture taken," the brigadiere said pointedly.

"No one would recognize him, anyway," Don Marco the Mayor replied, after a moment of reflection.

"But in Rome there is an office called the Anthropometric Police," the brigadiere said resentfully. Everyone looked at him with respect, and Don Marco's eyes became sulky.

"In Rome they do nothing!" he grumbled.

While the crowd was distracted by the quarrel of the authorities, Bastia crept along stealthily until he reached an opening between the first and second row of women. From there he had an unobstructed view of the face of the man with the gray hat. Why did he play 72? In the cabala 72 meant *bride*, *travel by coach*, *flying without wings*, and *being pursued by a horse*. Why on earth had he played 72?

Green flies were clustered in bunches upon Luigi's neck. One, big as a beetle, kept chasing away the others, flying low and bumping them, to clear the spot over which it wanted to land. A peasant came, bringing a blanket. At a gesture of the Mayor he laid it down on the body, lingering to feel the material as if he were going to buy it.

"Don't worry, you'll get it back," the Mayor told the peasant.

"Don't take it back, you'll never be able to sleep," someone warned.

"This winter you'll die of pneumonia," Bastia remarked, pulling him by the sleeve and winking.

The flies had flown away, but the big one came back, walked over the blanket, testing it here and there, and found a hole. Bastia followed it intently. All of a sudden the fly buzzed away and then Bastia saw it swoop down on the man with the gray hat. Green flies love rottenness, he thought. The fly climbed along the jacket, reached the shoulder, then turned back and disappeared into a fold at the elbow.

Now Bastia's vision was shut off by a pair of legs accompanied by a scabbard. He crawled back, went all around the bushes to avoid being noticed by the authorities, and stopped next to the man with the gray hat. He looked at his shoes. They were nas-

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ty shoes, almost yellow. He touched the man lightly, as if he wanted to speak to him; but at that moment the crowd broke up to let two men pass through with a stretcher. The women crossed themselves. The man with the gray hat shuffled back, treading on Bastia's foot. Bastia looked up at his face. There was a twitch running over his lips, like ripples over the skin of a horse. The man had hooked his thumbs under the armpits of his vest. His hands lay flat on his breast, showing thick nails bordered with dark strips. The big green fly had landed on the middle finger and was seesawing on the nail, alternately bending forward to taste it and then rocking back to rub its feet together, because, caked under the nail, was dried blood.

When the carabinieri lifted the blanket to place the body upon the stretcher, even the Mayor stopped giving orders. Bastia saw the green fly hovering frenziedly over the glaring gash; he felt sorry for those sturdy shoulders which ended in nothing. He put the cage down on the ground and took off his hat.

Then the stretcher was carried away, and the entire crowd followed it down the road. The man with the gray hat walked alone toward the hills.

"Who's that fellow?" Bastia asked a woman, starting to pull his hurdy-gurdy.

"They say he has opened a butcher shop somewhere in the valley. He is a butcher, that much I know. . . ."

Bastia scratched his ear. Were things getting silly or were they getting straight?

Saturday came, and then Sunday and Monday. On Monday night, in the main square of Monticello, the people were gathered in front of the post office. Soon the numbers for this week's lottery would be posted in the window. And there was much impatience — every player had had to wait three long days to know his luck, now that the telephone line had been torn down by the spring offensive and the numbers had to come from Rome on the bus which ran only twice a week.

In the center of the square, near the fountain, Bastia was sitting on the handle of his hurdy-gurdy, swinging Pasqualino's cage from left to right. From time to time he would answer the questions of the women, or listen to their chattering. But his mind was pursuing intricate combinations of thoughts, and several times his eyes looked high over the church belfry where Cassiopeia would shine in a little while, with her five stars which seemed to form a cardinal's hat.

"Linda's daughter saw the head on top of a tree," a woman said. "She ran home and her mother took her to church. . . ."

"Did they find the head?" asked Bastia, startled.

"No, when the police arrived, it had disappeared. . . ."

"It was her sick stomach," the owner of the wine shop intervened.

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"The pharmacist explained it, he is a learned man. . . . You see, he said that children have the special power of indigestion. . . ."

"You mean suggestion," Bastia said.

"What?"

The owner of the wine shop turned to the women, who were listening intently, and waved his hand in a gesture of pity and contempt.

"What numbers did you get out of the murder?" the owner asked, lifting his chin challengingly.

"The numbers, the numbers!" someone called out. The crowd rushed over to the post office. Only Bastia remained seated, but he strained his eyes to see, and repeated to himself: 84, 14, 72. The sun struck just above the window and made it difficult to peer through the deep shadow below. Bastia unhooked Pasqualino's cage and walked, head down, toward the post office. When he reached the window, he raised his head with a jerk.

None of the easy numbers had been drawn.

"You are no good," a voice said behind his back. It was the woman who had dreamed of two baskets of eggs.

"And your fortune cards are fakes," another added.

The owner of the wine shop blocked his way. The people closed in.

"Listen," he said, "you paid half price for my wine and gave me good numbers. Good numbers — bah! Give me my five lire, you cheat!"

"You always bring bad luck," commented an old man. "The day you were here the planes came and my house was bombed out."

Bastia grabbed the handles of the hurdy-gurdy, slung the strap across his shoulder, and started down the hill that led out of town. On the main road he gathered his strength and set on toward a village three miles away. The shadow was climbing swiftly to the hilltops. One by one the farmhouses, left behind by the sun, sprang white upon the earth. Bastia kept looking at the fugitive light. Always, as night found him on the road, the image of a jug of wine under a bed with a mattress would become so haunting as to lose all sense of reality. Once, when it was harvest time, he was so thirsty and tired that he had seen in the contours of jug and bed a new constellation, on the left side of Orion. But now he was not thinking of wine and rest. After a while he slowed down and came to a stop. There was the embankment and the blackberry bushes behind which the headless body of Luigi had lain. There the authorities had picked up the farmer who owned that piece of land and had dumped him into jail. The people of Monticello wanted good numbers for the crime, not justice for the crime.

He turned to Pasqualino: "So you don't care to listen to me either? You haven't spoken all day long."

The parrot squinted a couple of times. His pupils were opaque, they no longer showed their round funny bewilderment. Bastia resumed pulling the hurdy-gurdy.

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"Remember that I brought you up," he went on. "You couldn't even crack an almond when I first met you. Now I am only asking you to speak, to ask me why — it helps me to grasp the ideas. . . . All right, I'll tell you again: the easy numbers don't group together. Wait, first of all you must understand that the perfect group is three. . . ."

He stopped pulling and sat down on the handle of the hurdy-gurdy, waiting for Pasqualino's question. He wanted very badly to explain to him the recurrence of three in all the patterns he had ever worked out: happiness was made of bread, bed, and peace; bread was made of flour, water, and yeast; bed was made of mattress, pillow, and sheets; peace was made of wine, women, and dreams. . . .

"You see, Pasqualino," he said, "now I have a group of two: Luigi and the butcher. Between them there is an attraction, but an attraction is not a link. . . ." He paused for a few seconds. "Ask me why, Pasqualino. . . ."

The parrot rocked slowly along the perch.

"Ask me why," Bastia said again, growing impatient.

Pasqualino blinked and said nothing.

"Yesterday I had thirty-five lire and I spent thirty of them to buy chestnuts for you! Listen to me, and answer me, or I swear I'll starve you to death!"

He opened the drawer, took out half a loaf of dark bread, the cabala, Luigi's boots which he would wear only in the winter, and finally the sock filled with Pasqualino's chestnuts. He piled everything on the board between the handles of the hurdy-gurdy, next to the cage, and drew out a handful of chestnuts.

"See, look! You rascal. . . . Aren't they sweet and crunchy?"

Pasqualino thrust his head between the bars, puffed up his neck, stretched it out to reach the chestnuts, but one of the boots was in his way; angrily he riffled his feathers, pecked at the sole, then with beak and claw he gripped the boot and instead of pushing it away, dragged it right against the cage.

"Now you are stuck!" Bastia laughed. "What will you do? Eat the leather?"

Pasqualino was nibbling at the boot. He had painstakingly lifted his body, clutching the bars with both claws, and every second he would slide down a little, pull his body up again and resume nibbling, stubbornly feeling along the thick edge of the sole before biting it. Bastia saw Pasqualino getting hold of a tiny thing, a corner of some paper, and then pulling, pulling, until a small oblong card came out.

"Give it to me," he whispered.

On the card there was a flag and these words:

The bearer of this card is authorized by the Committee of National Liberation to requisition cattle in behalf of the Partisan Brigades. Payment will be made as soon as a free government is established.

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Bastia's face became all wrinkled. He scratched his ear; he felt a great confusion inside his head. But he caught Pasqualino's look, and it was sad and imploring.

"Here, here," he stammered, "eat your chestnuts, eat them all. . . . You are a good fellow, a great fellow. . . . I promise you one day I'll be rich, I promise. . . . Then I'll buy you real peanuts. . . . You remember that professor who told us that your food should be peanuts? . . . But they are too expensive, they come from abroad. . . . You've never seen them. . . . How can I describe them to you? . . . They are . . . they look like butterfly cocoons . . . hunchback butterflies, Pasqualino. . . ."

That Friday the people of Monticello waited long hours for Bastia and his fortune cards. But Bastia never showed up. In a wake of mazurkas and waltzes the hurdy-gurdy had jolted through the streets of all the towns in the valley and the surrounding hills, as far as Castelnuovo, where it was now resting in front of a butcher shop.

"Don't put stones into candy wrappers or Pasqualino will get mad," Bastia was warning a gang of children.

For one hour he had been watching the shop, and the butcher was never alone. At this moment only one customer was left, but she was still debating whether it was more economical to buy the skinny chicken she held by the feet or the chunk of beef the butcher was showing her. Bastia waved his hand to attract her attention:

"The beef has no bones," he advised her.

The woman bought the chicken and went away. Bastia released the catch, waited until the first notes of a tango sprang from the hurdy-gurdy, and then hurried into the shop.

"Good morning," he said as he entered. "Would you be interested in three good numbers? . . . I'm sorry to disturb you, but this is a real bargain. . . . Three brand-new numbers. . . . You can have them for just a piece of meat. . . ."

The butcher wiped his face with the apron. It seemed to Bastia that he was trying to hide behind it, it took him so long to rub the back of his neck.

"I bet you've never heard about American numbers, have you? . . . No, I suppose not. . . . You see, numbers are drawn from lucky stars — that's why Americans are so rich: their sky has more stars than ours. . . ."

The butcher turned toward the wall, lifted a quarter of beef from one of the huge hooks and slammed it down on the marble counter. But Bastia wasn't impressed. He reached out and flipped a bunch of fortune cards under his nose.

"Look, I'm going to tear them to pieces," he announced. "They are no good now that I've learned the American numbers. . . ." And he tore up the cards and scattered the

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pieces over the floor. "In America they have professors, big professors who study the numbers. . . . You think you know the number for Death and the one for the Moon? . . . Ha, ha, just remember that both of them are wrong!"

Bastia dug into his pocket and pulled out a bunch of papers tied with a shoelace. He began to look through them. He was very tense; now he could feel the butcher's black pupils on the tips of his fingers every time he turned a page.

"Wait, I'll show you. . . . Here it is: Carolina, the widow who lives down in the valley. . . . A fine woman, I say, and she believes in the changing world . . . 'Carolina, try the American numbers,' I told her, and she put twenty lire on them — twenty lire, mind you, and she picks rags for a living. . . . Excuse me, I have to go and wind up my machine. . . ."

Bastia backed out of the door into the street and when the tango ended, he moved the pointer to a mazurka, wound up the spring, and returned to the shop, carrying Pasqualino in his cage.

"Here is Pasqualino," he announced, "And you, what's your name?"

"Mastrantonio," the butcher answered sharply.

"Pasqualino, meet my friend Mastrantonio. . . . Did you see him nod? . . . He's a really well-behaved parrot, and he's smart, too. Do you know how many languages he can speak?"

"What about that woman?" the butcher asked, jerking his apron.

"Woman? Oh, Carolina. . . ."

"Yes, Carolina. . . ."

"I told you she played twenty lire on the American numbers. . . ."

"And?"

Bastia sat down on a stool and placed the cage on the floor.

"Now she's in Rome," he sighed; and seeing that Mastrantonio was about to explode, he added promptly: "There wasn't enough money at the post office to pay her three thousand five hundred times twenty lire."

"You mean — she won?"

"She promised me a nice present. . . ."

"How did she win? What did you tell her?"

"I told her: 'Carolina, give me your book of numbers — I'll correct them. These are brand-new, they are rich, they come from America.' . . . Carolina has a brother in America, he has two automobiles. . . ."

Mastrantonio stepped down from behind the high counter, took off his apron, and sat down opposite Bastia. For a while he punched the palm of his left hand with his right fist; then he stopped, opened his mouth, and again he punched his hand, harder and harder. Bastia quietly continued to scratch Pasqualino under the soft feathers of his chest, attentive as ever, waiting for the words Mastrantonio was going to speak.

"Write down these new numbers for me too," Mastrantonio said in one breath.

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"First you'll give me a couple of pounds of meat," Bastia replied with a smile.

The butcher rushed behind the counter, took a knife, and started to cut.

"You forgot to give me the book," Bastia reminded him. "How do you expect me to correct the numbers?"

"You swear that woman Carolina . . ."

"I swear."

Mastrantonio wrapped up the meat in a piece of newspaper and went through the door at the rear of the shop. He came out with a book and handed it to Bastia, holding the meat behind his back.

"First write down the new numbers," he said.

Bastia glanced at the cover: the picture on it was not the blindfolded girl stretched out on a golden quilt; it was a kind of trumpet, overflowing with fruits and jewels.

"I'll only correct a few of them to start. . . . You didn't even weigh the meat. . . . Is it lean or fat? . . . I don't like fat meat. . . ."

Bastia's ears heard something about beggars who shouldn't be so particular. His eyes seemed to follow the up and down motion of the scale. His fingers kept leafing unobtrusively through the book and his mind went on repeating: Does this cabala give different meanings for the numbers? Did Mastrantonio play 72 as the middle link of the crime? When the butcher told him that stripped of all the fat, the meat still weighed more than two pounds, Bastia nodded in approval and turned to the page where the column started with 70.

"I have to go and lock up my hurdy-gurdy," he said. "Wait a minute. . . ."

He turned his back to the butcher, put the open book on the stool, and bent to pick up Pasqualino's cage. Quick as a shot he read: 72 — *the bride, traveling by coach, the assassin* . . .

Out in the street he said to Pasqualino: "Will you ever get tired of chestnuts?"

"Why?"

"Because 72 doesn't add up to anything — it doesn't even add up to peanuts. . . ."

Coming back into the shop he saw the butcher sitting on the low stool, his thumbs hooked under the armpits of his vest, his dark eyes half shut, with an air of waiting for something to happen.

"Here is a pencil. . . ."

But Bastia didn't hear. He began to pace up and down the narrow passage which led to the door; then he turned abruptly and said:

"I've thought it over: I'm not going to give you the new numbers. . . ."

"What?"

"You can keep your meat. You don't believe in the order of the world, you are like the people of Monticello. . . ."

"I'm from Rispoli," Mastrantonio replied, "It's down South, near the Straits. . . ."

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"North or South, people are all the same when they're fools. . . ." Bastia put the cage on the counter and clapped his hands in a gesture of discouragement. "Do you know Cassiopeia?"

"Where does she live?"

"Tonight she'll be on top of the belfry at Monticello — don't stare at me!" Bastia screamed so unexpectedly that the butcher became pale. "I'm not crazy, I can name every star in the sky! The people of Monticello make fun of me, they don't listen to me, and so now they've lost the greatest chance of their lives. . . . Tell it to him, Pasqualino!"

"Why?"

The butcher snapped up from the stool: "Who said why?"

"You did!"

"I did not!"

"Then it was the parrot, who cares! . . . Let me get up on this counter, I was born to sit on marble. . . . Oh, how Cassiopeia was shining, that sweet and lucky Cassiopeia! And the people of Monticello didn't realize that their great day had come, because they watch the sky only for rain or snow, and never for the portentous signs of the stars. The rules of numbers are drawn from the stars. . . . Below Cassiopeia lay the body of a man whose head had been chopped off. . . ." Bastia slid promptly from the counter. An old lady entered the shop and asked for a pound of giblets.

"Giblets?"

"Yes, giblets. . . ."

"Giblets," Mastrantonio repeated stupidly.

"I'm sorry, I just bought the last of them," Bastia explained. "Good day, Madam. . . . And the people of Monticello," he resumed as soon as the lady was out of sight, "those morons played the numbers for the beheaded man, the butchering, and the assassin," — he banged his chest and spat on the floor — "without thinking that any man could be a beheaded man whose body had been strung up by the feet, and that any other man who had got rid of a head could be an assassin! Imbeciles! The rule of Cassiopeia says that the important numbers don't show, that what counts is *what's missing*, and that only when everything is in its place, with its name and its reason, so that no confusion is possible — only then do the right numbers group together, bright as the first stars after sunset!"

He put his foot on the stool and climbed up on the counter again, hugging Pasqualino's cage with one arm. "And now tell me, Mastrantonio: What was missing there? Can't you see? The head was missing, the head wasn't there, the head was important! . . . And what else was missing? The reason for the killing wasn't there, the reason was missing, the reason was important! . . . But something else wasn't there: justice was missing, justice wasn't there, and justice is the most important of all — because justice has no number for itself — *it is what links the other numbers together!*"

A twitch was running over Mas-

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trantonio's lips. Before Bastia could continue, he jumped up and kicked the stool:

"Get out! You have green eyes, you bring bad luck — get out!"

"First, I'd like to tell you the number I found," Bastia said calmly, picking up the cage. "Then I'll go. Write it down if you want to . . . 55. It's the reason for the crime."

"What's 55?" the butcher snapped, and his pupils were small and nasty.

"Cattle."

Mastrantonio sat down.

"Who told you?"

"Pasqualino."

"Get out, you and your crazy bird! Get out, get out!"

"All right, I'll go. . . . But don't say that Pasqualino is crazy — he has been living for more than two hundred years, he spots the truth wherever it is, he never cracks an empty shell!" Bastia slid off the counter. "All right, remember the rule of Cassiopeia. . . . Ah, I almost forgot," he added from the threshold, "The rule says also that when you find one of the missing things, it will lead you to another one. . . . I think I've found the second number. . . . Good day, Mastrantonio. . . ."

The butcher grabbed Bastia by the arm and pulled him back.

"Is he possessed?" he muttered, pointing at the parrot.

"He was blessed by the bishop of his town," Bastia answered gravely. "He is like a human being, except that he doesn't lie. . . ."

"You swear?"

"I swear."

"Otherwise I'll choke him. Was it he who told you the second number?"

"May I sit here? . . . Thank you. . . . I love marble, it's cool and smooth," Bastia remarked, climbing back onto the counter, "You can follow its veins all the way through, like thoughts in a brain. . . . Look here: I'll start from this black spot and I'll show you. Here is cattle. Now ask yourself: Who owns cattle? Let's see . . . move your finger along this streak — that's a thought winding into your brain — and what do you find at the end of it? You find a peasant — a peasant owns cattle, right? Now, put your finger down again and follow this second streak, that's right — and when you reach the end what do you have? You have a butcher — a butcher owns cattle too. See how it works? And now switch to the third streak, this yellow one that's as straight as a dart, and let your finger run along it until you meet a landowner — a landowner owns cattle. . . ."

Bastia paused, his eyes on Mastrantonio's finger. He saw the butcher's finger stiffen, and again the twitch ran over Mastrantonio's lips. Then Bastia rapped his forehead lightly with his knuckles:

"Do you see how a brain can work?" he said. "So, where are we? A landowner owns cattle, or a peasant, or a butcher. . . . But here we are stuck, because if someone steals ten cows from a landowner, or a single pig from a peasant, or one quarter of beef from

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a butcher, the hatred is the same and a man could be killed for it. So we still don't know who the killer is. But the rule of Cassiopeia says also that when you find one of the missing things it will always lead to another. Let's think together: What kind of man would steal cattle? He might be a thief, and then the peasant, the landowner, or the butcher might kill him. But if he were just a thief, would they kill him and chop off his head? Would they be afraid to have people see the face of a thief? No, they wouldn't. So the man who was killed had stolen cattle, but he was not a thief. And so there is only one possibility for the second number: it's the only clean, lucky number that the war brought us: 11, *the partisan.* . . . Partisans would take away cattle to be able to carry on the fight in the mountains, but they are not thieves. . . ."

Slowly Mastrantonio's finger slid back along the yellow streak on the marble. "If you have the third number," he stammered, "will they come out for sure? Will you win a million lire?"

"No, by God, no," Bastia sighed, getting off the counter. "You are as dumb as the people of Monticello. The head is missing, and the killer is missing, and justice is missing. . . . Do I have to repeat it all over again?"

"What should I do?" the butcher asked; and his mouth didn't close, and tiny bubbles crept from underneath his tongue.

"Listen, Mastrantonio, one thing leads to another. I told you! Look for the head — the head may show the killer. . . . Do you remember what happened to John the Baptist? A woman became crazy with love for him, and he was cold as ice. She felt so terribly insulted that she chopped his head off. . . . So, if you had found the head of John the Baptist, you could have easily guessed who the killer was. . . ."

"And if . . . if I don't find the head?"

"If you don't find the head, look for the killer." Bastia's green eyes had become two narrow slits. "One thing leads to the other — the head shows the killer, the killer shows the head. Then there will be justice, and justice will link the numbers together and give you a million lire. . . . Now I must go, it's getting late."

"Wait, wait, take your meat. . . ."

"Keep it," Bastia replied, stepping out into the street, "You are as dumb as the people of Monticello."

He turned back and gave him a hard look: "This is your chance, Mastrantonio. Don't be a fool!"

Two days later a farmer, dripping with sweat and covered with dust, entered the main square of Monticello. He was carrying a basket, his outstretched arm holding it carefully away from his body, as if he were taking a mangy dog to the veterinary. A gang of children were walking at his side, storming him with questions; and the farmer kept quickening his pace and saying no at every step, and

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once he even made a gesture as though to kick a little girl, when she tried to put her hand inside the basket. When he reached the carabinieri station, he called: "Brigadiere, brigadiere, come down, hurry, hurry!"

In shops and houses people heard him call. In a minute the shops and houses were empty. The crowd saw him in the room on the main floor, the basket on the table and the brigadiere closing the shutters of the window, and so they swarmed in, filled the corridor, and pushed the door open.

"Every one out!" the brigadiere shouted.

No one moved.

"Then keep quiet!"

Someone sneaked over to the table and screamed: "The head, the head!"

The scream echoed through the corridor and out into the square. The people inside the room moved slowly, the women murmuring prayers, the men coughing awkwardly, all staring at the basket, at the bundle in the basket, wrapped in newspapers on which they could read, *The Anzio Landing*, and nothing else, because it was all splattered and wrinkled, and here and there it was torn and black hair showed through.

"You say you found it just above the embankment," the brigadiere said. "Let's see. . . . You, Pirotta, go to the Town Hall and call the Mayor. He was so sure the head would never show up. He wanted to make a bet with me. He certainly doesn't understand the mechanics of criminal psychology!"

The people looked at the brigadiere respectfully. The carabiniere came back and said that the Mayor was not in his office.

"Then we will examine it now," the brigadiere decided. "Give me a pair of scissors."

He began to cut away the newspaper. A green fly entered the room through the window and stopped, hanging in the air just above the basket. The brigadiere cut the paper round and round, laid down the scissors, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and pulled the wrappings away with one jerk. With his other hand he lifted up the head of the Mayor.

The following Monday, at about sunset, the people of Monticello were all gathered in the square. They were waiting for the numbers to be posted in the window and were speaking excitedly about the terrible things which had happened. They were anxious to know the truth, but the truth was a secret; the brigadiere and the carabinieri were deaf and dumb, and the Chief of Police who had come from the city with two special agents and a doctor had declared that the work of justice couldn't be hampered by unsolicited statements. Only the priest and the pharmacist had been admitted into the narrow circle of the authorities. The people glanced from time to time at the balcony of the Town Hall, where the authorities were sitting, and then at the White Horse Inn, where a supper had been ordered for them, in the small se-

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cluded room upstairs.

"A clear case of homicidal mania," the doctor was saying to the brigadiere. "What did that butcher Mastrantonio tell you when you showed him the basket and the knife you found near Don Marco's body? He explained to you, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that he needed the head, that the Mayor refused to tell him where the head was, so he just decided that the head of the Mayor was the thing, because it would show the killer. . . . There is a tragic boastfulness in these maniacs, they love to horrify their audience."

"Allow me to say," the pharmacist interrupted, "that superstition. . . . The numbers he mentioned, and the stars. . . . The agent told us that the crowd in the shop asked him to give them the numbers — you see, they are all crazy for numbers, they didn't want him to be taken away before he could give them the numbers."

"As far as I'm concerned," the brigadiere smiled humbly, "it's a case of sex perversion. . . . When I was in Rome at the school of criminology, I read the works of an Englishman who . . . Anyway, there are people who chop heads off chickens or ducks to have . . ." He threw a glance at the priest who was listening attentively, and added, "You understand, doctor. . . ."

In the farthest corner of the square Bastia was sitting on the handle of his hurdy-gurdy, talking softly to Pasqualino. "Take a look at the authorities," he was saying, "I bet they're swearing that the Mayor was a nice man, a great soul. Do you remember how many times I spat, when I passed his villa? There were always German cars in front of his villa, he was entertaining those bastards. . . . Oh, the authorities don't believe the story that Mastrantonio tried to tell them on his way to jail. . . . It's so easy not to believe a scoundrel like Mastrantonio who used to go around telling the farmers that the Mayor would keep their cattle in his barn, and protect it from the Germans with his own authority!"

On the balcony the Police Chief looked at the brigadiere with severity and put an end to his description of other sexual perversions.

"When I make my report to Rome," the Chief announced solemnly, "I shall stress the fact that there is a deliberate attempt in this case to distort a common crime into a political reprisal, and to exploit the favor — whether it be right or wrong is not up to me to judge — which the partisans enjoy. . . . In fact, everyone knows that the Mayor — and I may say, all of us — have always regarded the partisans with favor. . . ."

"Pay attention, Pasqualino, instead of trying to scratch your back," Bastia said impatiently. "Mastrantonio slaughtered the cattle and everything was beautifully arranged for the Germans to arrive in the middle of the night and pretend to be looting the countryside, so that the

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Mayor would appear to be a victim. They had offered him more than one million lire for that cattle. But that night the partisans showed up first, took the cattle, and left only a card for a receipt. . . . The Germans could pay millions with the money taken from our people, but the partisans couldn't pay, you understand?"

"What a fantastic concoction of lies!" the Police Chief was commenting, after having listened to the written report which the agent had prepared, "It is simply preposterous to make the Mayor kill a partisan who has escaped from the Germans, when the Mayor himself was supporting the families of those other three partisans who had been executed!"

"But you see, Pasqualino," Bastia went on, "the Mayor only pretended to help the partisans. He promised to send them other food, to any locality they choose, as long as it was far from his farm, because certainly the Germans were suspicious. And when everything was planned and the night came to deliver the food, the barn where the partisans were waiting was surrounded by the Germans. Three partisans were caught and buried, but nobody suspected that a fourth one had escaped. That one was Luigi. Luigi came back and wanted to know why. . . . The Mayor killed him, and for the butchering he called Mastrantonio, who was already his accomplice in robbing the peasants of their cattle. The Mayor got rid of the head, Mastrantonio loaded the body on his cart, among quarters of beef, and later rolled it down the embankment."

"Supper must be ready," the Chief of Police was saying, "I can smell the roast. . . . Have I made myself clear? No one can possibly make a coherent story out of the butcher's statements. This incoherence justifies our only — I insist, our only — possible deduction: that this Mastrantonio is guilty of both crimes and that he is mentally deficient. . . ."

"But wait a minute," said the brigadiere, "I forgot to tell you. . . ." He smiled and was on the brink of saying that the Mayor had shown a queer cocksuredness in betting that the head would never be found; but at the same time he remembered that his forthcoming promotion depended on a relative of Don Marco; so he stopped talking and meekly followed the Chief of Police down the stairs.

Bastia shoved his finger between the bars of the cage and let Pasqualino perch on it — such a gentle, good little creature.

"Yes, Pasqualino," he whispered, "if Mastrantonio had gone to look for justice at the police station, he would merely have been thrown into jail as a murderer and slanderer. The authorities stick together, they protect each other, and if Don Marco were still alive they would certainly give him a banquet — yes, even now. And so I had to teach Mastrantonio the rule of Cassiopeia, I had to confuse him into linking the numbers together with his own hands. But don't

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think I'm so smart — it was you who gave me the real hint.

"When you picked up Luigi's Partisan Card, a thought crossed the sky, quick and clear as a shooting star: Don Marco, the landowner who starved his farmhands and entertained the Germans, and then rushed to welcome the Americans and made that speech for the liberation, and began to send money to the families of those three partisans who had been buried in quick-lime. . . . Why should such a bastard send money to the partisans' families? Only if he were scared! So the attractions that keep the world moving started to work again, and the Mayor Don Marco had to be added to Luigi and the butcher. The butcher lived in Castelnuovo, the same town in which the Mayor had his estate, and probably he did his slaughtering for him. That's why I went to see Mastrantonio's cabala book — I was sure 72 was the Mayor. But the cabala didn't tell me anything; I had to use my own judgment. You remember when I asked Mastrantonio to trace the streaks on the marble? Well, when I explained that the yellow streak led to a landowner, his finger became stiff — it stopped moving as suddenly as though it were stuck in a splotch of tar. Then I had no more doubts, and I forced the rule of Cassiopeia into his brain: The head shows the killer, the killer shows the head. . . . I meant the head of Luigi, but anyway no other head could have shown the killer better than the head of Don Marco himself. . . ."

Bastia opened the drawer of his hurdy-gurdy and patted Luigi's boots with sympathy. Then he gave Pasqualino a chestnut, and he put three in his mouth, because no one had bought his fortune cards and he was broke again. But he had seen Cassiopeia peeping above the belfry in the first shadow of night, and he was dreaming of a jug of wine and a bed. The right numbers would come up, now that justice was done: 15, *the patriot* — 41, *the traitor* — 67, *the accomplice*. Three thousand five hundred times twenty lire. . . . He was calm and confident.

When the people rushed to the window of the post office, Bastia pushed his hurdy-gurdy through the square, climbed onto the handle, and strained his eyes to see. Not one of his three numbers had been drawn.

He felt so weak that he almost dropped to the ground. Slowly an idea began to creep behind his forehead. But it was too difficult to be told in words; he pointed at the sky and drew a circle with a sweep of his arm, an all-embracing circle.

"You see, Pasqualino," he said, "there are rules for the numbers and there are rules for the stars. . . . There are so many things in the universe, more than the cabala can list, and all of them turn with the sky and group together in constantly new patterns. . . . If a man could know the rules of the universe, he wouldn't be playing the lottery."

"*Why?*" Pasqualino asked.

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CASE OF THE OVERHEATED FLAT

by ERIC AMBLER

Assistant Commissioner Mercer did not often attend inquests. It was no part of his duty to do so. The fact that on that foggy December morning he should be sitting in a coroner's court in a London suburb instead of in his room at New Scotland Yard argued wholly exceptional circumstances.

The circumstances were indeed exceptional. It looked as though a murderer were going to escape the consequences of his crime and as if there were nothing that Scotland Yard could do about it.

In 1933, the wife of Mr. Thomas Jones, an industrial chemist living in a Midland town, had died in her bath from carbon monoxide poisoning. At the inquest, her death had been found to be due to a defective water heater. Three months previously, Mr. Jones had insured her life for £5,000, but although the police reviewed the possibility of his having engineered the defect in the heater, no proof of his having done so had been forthcoming. A verdict of accidental death had been returned.

In 1935, Mr. Jones had married again. His second wife had been 15 years his senior. It had been, no doubt, the £15,000 which the second Mrs. Jones had inherited from her mother which had bridged the difference in their ages. But Mr. Jones was, it seemed, unlucky in love. Eighteen months after their marriage, the second Mrs. Jones had died; and strange to relate, from carbon monoxide poisoning. She had been found in her car, which had been inside the garage with the engine running. According to the hapless Mr. Jones, his wife had been subject to fainting fits. Evidently, she had driven the car into the garage, felt faint and remained in the driving seat. There had been a strong wind and no doubt the garage doors had been blown to, leaving her at the mercy of the exhaust fumes. The fact that a small quantity of veronal had been found in her stomach had been accounted for by her doctor, who said that she had been in the habit of taking sleeping draughts. A verdict of accidental death had been returned.

In 1938, Mr. Jones, now of independent means, had married yet again. His third wife's name had been Rose and she had had an income of £1,200 a year from house property left to her by her father. The week before the inquest which Mercer was now attending, Mrs. Jones had died — from carbon monoxide poisoning.

The couple had lived in an expensive apartment. According to a preternaturally lugubrious Mr. Jones,

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he had been at his golf club on the afternoon of "the tragedy" and had returned home at about 6 o'clock to find the apartment full of gas and his wife dead in her bed. The gas fire in the bedroom had been turned full on.

Mercer listened to the evidence gloomily. The law prohibited any mention of the fate of Mr. Jones's first two wives while the fate of the third was still *sub judice.* No doubt Mr. Jones was aware of that. Mercer saw that the man was making an excellent impression on the jury. He was giving his evidence with sublime disregard of the implications contained in the questions being put to him.

Yes, he had given instructions for the gas heater to be installed.

No, it had been at his wife's request that he had done so.

No, it was not strange that she should need a gas fire in a centrally-heated room. She had felt the cold.

Yes, it was the only gas fire in the apartment. There was a portable electric radiator in another room, but his wife had not liked it in the bedroom.

No, it was not strange that he had insisted upon an old type gas heater instead of the new type. His wife had expressed a preference for the former. He was sorry now that he had not insisted upon the new type. The accident could not then have happened.

He had left his wife at 2:30 to go to his golf club, 10 minutes' walk away.

No, he had not gone straight there. He had gone first to a news agent's store and bought a magazine for his wife. He had then returned to the entrance lobby of the apartment building and asked the hall porter to take the magazine up to Mrs. Jones. He had then gone on to the golf club.

No, he had not seen his wife alive after leaving the apartment at 2:30. The hall porter must have been the last person to see her alive.

As far as he could remember, he had arrived at the golf club at about 3 o'clock. But he couldn't be certain. The secretary of the golf club would probably remember. He had met him soon after he had arrived.

Yes (this with a puzzled frown) there was a gas meter in the flat. Yes, the main gas tap was beside it. As far as he could remember, the meter was at the top of a cupboard just inside the door of the apartment. Yes, he believed that he had suggested its installation there instead of in the kitchen. To have installed it in the kitchen would have meant loss of cupboard space.

The jury, Mercer noted, were beginning to fidget. Clearly they did not see the point of this questioning. They had been shown a plan of the apartment. Couldn't they visualize the scene? Mr. Jones turning the gas off at the main and then turning on the gas fire in the bedroom, Mr. Jones returning to the lobby with a magazine, the hall porter going up in the elevator to deliver the magazine while Mr. Jones ascended again by the stairs? Couldn't they see Mr. Jones waiting on the stairs while the hall

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porter descended again and his wife got into bed? Couldn't they see Mr. Jones quietly opening the door of the apartment, reaching up to the cupboard, turning the main gas tap on again and quietly leaving? The hall porter had admitted that he didn't watch the entrance all the time. Didn't they see that Mr. Jones could have done these things and got to his golf club in time to show himself to a secretary "soon after" 3? It must be obvious, "Blockheads," he muttered, and heard Detective-Inspector Denton beside him stir in sympathy.

And then he saw Dr. Czissar.

The refugee Czech detective was sitting in one of the seats reserved for the press and as his brown, cowlike eyes met Mercer's gray ones, he inclined his head respectfully.

Mercer nodded curtly and looked away. The last person he wanted to think about at that moment was Dr. Jan Czissar. Since the first day on which this pale, bespectacled Czech had walked into his office bearing an unfurled umbrella and a letter of introduction from a Home Office official, Mercer had been nursing a badly wounded self-esteem. Three times had he had to listen to Dr. Czissar demonstrating, with his infuriating lecture-room mannerisms, that Scotland Yard could be wrong while he, Dr. Jan Czissar, "late Prague police," was right.

Mercer stood up. "We might get a sandwich across the road, Denton."

"Right, sir."

They had gone about three paces before Nemesis overtook them.

"Assistant Commissioner Mercer, please," said Dr. Czissar breathlessly. "Dr. Jan Czissar. Late Prague police. At your service. I would like, if you please, to speak about this case." He bowed quickly to Denton.

"I was very surprised," pursued Dr. Czissar, "to see you in this court this morning, assistant commissioner. It appeared such an unimportant case. But then of course, I had not heard the evidence. I wish to compliment you. It was so clever, I thought, the way in which the existence of the electric radiator was established. I was afraid for a time that the murderer's trick was going to succeed. But I should have known better. It is a most interesting case. I . . ."

But Mercer had stopped dead. "What did you say about an electric radiator?" he demanded.

Dr. Czissar repeated the sentence.

"May I remind you, doctor," snapped Mercer, "that Mrs. Jones was not burned to death or electrocuted, but gassed?"

A puzzled look came over the doctor's face. "But I thought," he said hesitantly, "that you understood . . ."

At that moment Mercer realized that his humiliations at the hands of Dr. Czissar were not ended, that the wound was to be opened yet again. There was nothing else for it. Dr. Czissar had obviously understood something about the case that he had not understood.

"I would very much like to discuss

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the case with you, doctor," he said ceremoniously. "Inspector Denton and I were about to take a little refreshment. If you would care to accompany us."

Three minutes later Dr. Czissar was sitting with a ham sandwich in front of him. "It is most kind of you, assistant-commissioner," he was repeating over and over again. The brown eyes behind the thick glasses were almost tearful.

"In the first place," said Dr. Czissar, "I considered this story of the gas heater being turned on accidentally. I tried to think of it actually happening. There is a tap and this lady has a long housecoat which catches in the tap, turning it on. So far it is possible. Improbable, as are all accidents, but possible. What happens now? According to Mr. Jones's evidence, the tap was turned full on when he returned to the apartment and found his wife dead. Therefore, we are asked to believe that while the lady was taking off her housecoat, getting into bed and going to sleep, the tap was all the time turned fully on. That, I thought, was not possible. I will explain why."

"We'll accept the proposition," put in Mercer hastily.

"To begin with," persisted Dr. Czissar, "a gas heater turned full on and unlighted makes a little noise. But let us assume that this lady was a little deaf. There is now the smell of the gas to be considered. My own sense of smell is not particularly sensitive, but I can easily detect one part of gas in 700 parts of air. Many persons, especially those who do not smoke, can detect by smell one part in 10,000. Is it credible that this lady should be awake in a small room for several minutes with the gas fire turned full on without smelling it? I think no!

"The accident then is impossible. And is not the police theory also impossible? Mr. Jones leaves the apartment at half-past 2. At 2:35 he hands the magazine to the hall porter. He then has to go up the stairs and wait until the porter has gone and his wife is asleep. Let us assume that he knows his wife's habits very well and that he can be sure when she will go to sleep. He will have to wait on the stairs. He then has to leave the building and reach the golf club without being seen. The risk to him would have been enormous. He might have been seen on the stairs by one of the other tenants. I cannot believe that a man like Mr. Jones would have taken such a risk."

"Then it wasn't murder?" said Denton.

Dr. Czissar smiled. "Oh, yes, it was murder, inspector. There is no doubt of it. But consider Mr. Jones's cleverness.

"He planned to murder his third wife. Very well. He realized that however skillfully he made it look like an accident, the police would suspect murder because of the first two cases you mention to me. Here is his cleverness. He decided to *use your suspicions* to make himself safe

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from conviction. You believed, naturally, that he stole back and turned on the main tap. Think how much he helped you to that belief! He had the gas heater installed in spite of the fact that there was efficient steam heating in the room. Very suspicious. He asked specially for an obsolete type of heater which would enable him to say that the affair was accidental. Very suspicious. His alibi is not perfect. Again suspicious. The only thing he did not help you to was the proof that he returned to the apartment. And he knows that you cannot get it for yourselves. Why? Because it does not exist. He did not return to the apartment. He is, therefore, safe. What does it matter to him if he is suspect? You cannot prove anything against him because you are trying to prove something that did *not* happen."

"Blimey!" said Denton.

"Blind you, indeed!" agreed Dr. Czissar courteously.

"But . . ."

"Attention, please!" said Dr. Czissar sharply. "I think the murder was done this way. Before he went out that day, Mr. Jones took the radiator and put it on its back underneath his wife's bed. He then sprinkled the heater element all over with the mixture of chalk and zinc dust and, having turned the current on the radiator, said goodbye. Next, he sent the hall porter up with the magazines to establish that his wife was alive when he left. But she was not alive for long. When the radiator became hot, the chalk and zinc dust reacted together and produced large quantities of carbon monoxide. When he returned home at 6 o'clock, she was dead. He then removed the radiator and turned on the gas. When the apartment smelt strongly of gas, he summoned help."

"But the proof, man, the proof!"

"Oh, yes. The zinc dust would have to be purchased from a laboratory supplier. It is much used as a reducing agent. Examination of the radiator will be helpful also. Your chemists will be able to find traces of both calcium and zinc oxides on the elements. And it is probable that the carpet under the bed will be rather scorched.

Mercer looked at Denton.

"Better ask the coroner for an adjournment, hadn't we, sir?"

Mercer nodded. Then he looked again at Dr. Czissar.

"Well, doctor," he said as heartily as he could, "we've got to thank you once again." He raised his glass. "Here's to Czechoslovakia!"

Dr. Czissar beamed with pleasure.

"I know the English toast," he said. He raised his glass of beer. "Cheerio, Czechoslovakia! All the best!" he said in ringing tones.

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Edward Lucas White, American novelist and poet, is probably best remembered for his historical novels. EL SUPREMO *told the story of Roderiguez de Francia, an early Nineteenth Century dictator of Paraguay; and* ANDIVIUS HEDULIO, *a famous best-seller of its day, was a picaresque treatment of young Emperor Commodus.*

Mr. White's short stories were eons removed from his other work. "The Snout" is a tale of fabulous robbery — cracksmanship on a truly grand scale — but it is not a formula story. We doubt if Edward Lucas White ever wrote a formula short story in all his life. Mr. White must have had a curious mind, and as a result he produced curious and curiously moving stories. "The Snout," as the author once wrote, came to him in the form of a dream, and because it has a dreamlike quality and because it is so genuinely different from anything you have ever read, we have chosen it to inaugurate a new department — "Bedtime Stories."

From time to time we shall bring you those peculiarly unorthodox tales which fuse crime or detection with other genres — off-the-trail stories which evoke an exceptional frisson d'horreur — that rare type of story calculated to raise goose flesh and freeze the cockles of the heart — indeed, those very stories which you should not *read at bedtime, especially if you are alone . . .*

THE SNOUT

by EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

I WAS not so much conning the specimens in the Zoölogical Garden as idly basking in the agreeable morning sunshine and relishing at leisure the perfect weather. So I saw him the instant he turned the corner of the building. At first I thought I recognized him, then I hesitated. At first he seemed to know me and to be just about to greet me; then he saw past me into the cage. His eyes bulged; his mouth opened into a long egg-shaped oval, till you might almost have said that his jaw dropped; he made an inarticulate sound, partly a grunt, partly the ghost of a howl, and collapsed in a limp heap on the gravel. I had not seen a human being since I passed the gate, some distance away. No one came when I called. So I dragged him to the grass by a bench, untied his faded, shiny cravat, took off his frayed collar and unbuttoned his soiled neckband. Then I peeled his coat off him, rolled it up, and put it under his knees as he lay on his back. I tried to find some water, but could see none. So I sat down on the bench near him. There he lay, his legs and body on the grass, his head in the dry

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gutter, his arms on the pebbles of the path. I was sure I knew him, but I could not recall when or where we had encountered each other before. Presently he answered to my rough and ready treatment and opened his eyes, blinking at me heavily. He drew up his arms to his shoulders and sighed.

"Queer," he muttered, "I come here because of you and I meet you."

Still I could not remember him and he had revived enough to read my face. He sat up.

"Don't try to stand up!" I warned him.

He did not need the admonition, but clung to the end of the bench, his head bowed wagglingly over his arms.

"Don't you remember?" he asked thickly. "You said I had a pretty good smattering of an education on everything except Natural History and Ancient History. I'm hoping for a job in a few days, and I thought I'd put in the time and keep out of mischief brushing up. So I started on Natural History first and ——"

He broke off and glared up at me. I remembered him now. I should have recognized him the moment I saw him, for he was daily in my mind. But his luxuriant hair, his tanned skin and above all his changed expression, a sort of look of acquired cosmopolitanism, had baffled me.

"Natural History!" he repeated, in a hoarse whisper. His fingers digging in the slats of the bench, he wrenched himself round to face the cage.

"Hell!" he screamed. "There it is yet!"

He held on by the end iron-arm of the bench, shaking, almost sobbing.

"What's wrong with you?" I queried. "What do you think you see in that cage?"

"Do you see anything in that cage?" he demanded in reply.

"Certainly," I told him.

"Then for God's sake," he pleaded. "What do you see?"

I told him briefly.

"Good Lord," he ejaculated. "Are we both crazy?"

"Nothing crazy about either of us," I assured him. "What we see in the cage is what is in the cage."

"Is there such a critter as that, honest?" he pressed me.

I gave him a pretty full account of the animal and its habits.

"Well," he said, weakly, "I suppose you're telling the truth. If there is such a critter let's get where I can't see it."

I helped him to his feet and assisted him to a bench altogether out of sight of that building. He put on his collar and knotted his cravat. While I had held it I had noticed that, through its greasy condition, it showed plainly having been a very expensive cravat. His clothes were seedy, but had been of the very best when new.

"Let's find a drinking fountain," he suggested, "I can walk now."

We found one not far away and at no great distance from it a shaded bench facing an agreeable view. I offered him a cigarette and we smoked. I meant to let him do most of the talking.

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"Do you know," he began presently. "Things you said to me run in my head more than anything anybody ever said to me. I suppose it's because you're a sort of philosopher and student of human nature and what you say is true. For instance, you said that criminals would get off clear three times out of four, if they just kept their mouths shut, but they have to confide in someone, even against all reason. That's just the way with me now."

"You aren't a criminal," I interrupted him. "You lost your temper and made a fool of yourself just once. If you'd been a criminal and had done what you did, you'd have likely enough got off, because you'd have calculated how to do it. As it was you put yourself in a position where everything was against you and you had no chance. We were all sorry for you."

"You most of all," he amplified. "You treated me bully."

"But we were all sorry for you," I repeated, "and all the jury too, and the judge. You're no criminal."

"How do you know," he demanded defiantly, "what I have done since I got out?"

"You've grown a pretty good head of hair," I commented.

"I've had time," he said. "I've been all over the world and blown in ten thousand dollars."

"And never seen ——" I began.

He interrupted me at the third word.

"Don't say it," he shuddered. "I never had, nor heard of one. But I wasn't after caged animals while I had any money left. I didn't remember your advice and your other talk till I was broke. Now, it's just as you said, I've just got to tell you. That's the criminal in me, I suppose."

"You're no criminal," I repeated soothingly.

"Hell," he snarled, "a year in the pen makes a man a criminal, if he never was before."

"Not necessarily," I encouraged him.

"It's pretty sure to," he sighed. "They treated me mighty well and put me to bookkeeping, and I got my full good-conduct allowance. But I met professionals, and they never forget a man.

"Now it don't make any difference what I did when I got out, nor what I tried to do nor how I met Rivvin, nor how he put Thwaite after me. No, nor how Thwaite got hold of me, nor what he said to me, nor anything, right up to the very night, till after we had started."

He looked me in the eye. His attitude became alert. I could see him warming to his narrative. In fact, when after very little rumination he began it, his early self dropped from him with his boyhood dialect and the jargon of his late associates. He was all the easy cosmopolitan telling his tale with conscious zest.

As if it had been broad day Thwaite drove the car at a terrific pace for nearly an hour. Then he stopped it

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while Rivvin put out every light. We had not met or overtaken anything, but when we started again through the moist, starless blackness it was too much for my nerves. Thwaite was as cool as if he could see. I could not so much as guess at him in front of me, but I could feel his self-confidence in every quiver of the car. It was one of those super-expensive makes which are, on any gear, at any speed, on any grade, as noiseless as a puma. Thwaite never hesitated in the gloom; he kept straight or swerved, crept or darted, whizzed or crawled for nearly an hour more. Then he turned sharp to the left and uphill. I could feel and smell the soaked, hanging boughs close above and about me, the wet foliage on them, and the deep sodden earth mold that squelched under the tires. We climbed steeply, came to a level, and then backed and went forward a length or so a half dozen times, turning. Then we stopped dead. Thwaite moved things that clicked and presently said:

"Now I'll demonstrate how a man can fill his gasoline tank in the pitch dark if he knows the touch system."

After some more time he said: "Rivvin, go bury this."

Rivvin swore, but went. Thwaite climbed in beside me. When Rivvin returned, he climbed in on the other side of me. He lit his pipe, Thwaite lit a cigar and looked at his watch. After I had lit too, Thwaite said:

"We've plenty of time to talk here and all you have to do is to listen. I'll begin at the beginning. When old Hiram Eversleigh died ——"

"You don't mean ——" I interrupted him.

"Shut up!" he snapped, "and keep your mouth shut. You'll have your say when I've done."

I shut up.

"When old man Eversleigh died," he resumed, "the income of the fortune was divided equally among his sons. You know what the others did with their shares: palaces in New York and London and Paris, chateaux on the Breton Coast, deer and grouse moors in Scotland, yachts and all the rest of it, the same as they have kept it up ever since. At first Vortigern Eversleigh went in for all that sort of thing harder than any one of his brothers. But when his wife died, more than forty years ago, he stopped all that at once. He sold everything else, bought this place, put the wall round it, and built that infinity of structures inside. You've seen the pinnacles and roofs of them, and that's all anybody I ever talked to has ever seen of them since they were finished about five years after his wife's death. You've seen the two gate-houses and you know each is big even for a millionaire's mansion. You can judge the size and extent of the complication of buildings that make up the castle or mansion-house or whatever you choose to call it. There Vortigern Eversleigh lived. Not once did he ever leave it that I can learn of. There he died. Since his death, full twenty years ago, his share of the Eversleigh income has been paid to his heir. No

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one has ever seen that heir. From what I'll tell you presently, you'll see that the heir is probably not a woman. But nobody knows anything about him, he has never been outside these miles of wall. Yet not one of the greedy, selfish Eversleigh grandsons and granddaughters, and sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, has ever objected to the payment to that heir of the full portion of Vortigern Eversleigh, and that portion has been two hundred thousand dollars a month, paid in gold on the first banking day of each month. I found that out for sure, for there have been disputes about the division of Wulfstan Eversleigh's share and of Cedric Eversleigh's share and I made certain from the papers in the suits. All that money, or the value of it, has been either reinvested or spent inside that park wall. Not much has been reinvested. I got on the track of the heir's purchases. He buys musical instruments — any quantity and at any price. Those were the first things I made sure of. And artists' materials, paints, brushes, canvas, tools, woods, clay, marble — tons of clay and great blocks of superfine-grained marble. He's no magpie collecting expensive trash for a whim; he knows what he wants and why; he has taste. He buys horses and saddlery and carriages, furniture and carpets and tapestries, pictures — all landscapes, never any figure pictures; he buys photographs of pictures by the ten thousand, and he buys fine porcelains, rare vases, table silver, ornaments of Venetian glass, silver and gold filigree, jewelry, watches, chains, gems, pearls, rubies, emeralds and — diamonds; diamonds!"

Thwaite's voice shook with excitement, though he kept it soft and even.

"Oh, I did two years' investigating," he went on, "I know. People blabbed. But not any of the servants or grooms or gardeners. Not a word could I get, at first or second or third hand, from them or any of their relatives or friends. They keep dumb. They know which side their bread is buttered on. But some of the discharged tradesmen's assistants told all I wanted to know and I got it straight, though not direct. No one from outside ever gets into that place beyond the big paved courtyards of the gatehouses. Every bit of supplies for all that regiment of servants goes into the brownstone gate-house. The outer gates open and the wagon or whatever it is drives under the archway. There it halts. The outer gates shut and the inner gates open. It drives into the courtyard. Then the Majordomo (I suppose that wouldn't be too big a name for him) makes his selections. The inner gates of the other gateway open and the wagon drives under the archway and halts. The inner gates close fast and the outer gates open. That's the way with every wagon and only one enters at a time. Everything is carried through the gate-house to the smaller inner courtyard and loaded on the wagons of the estate to be driven up to the mansion.

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"Everything like furniture, for instance, comes into the courtyard of the brownstone gate-house. There a sort of auditor verifies the inventory and receipts for the goods before two witnesses from the dealers and two for the estate. The consignment may be kept a day or a month; it may be returned intact or kept entire; any difference is settled for at once upon return of what is rejected. So with jewelry. I had luck. I found out for certain that more than a million dollars worth of diamonds alone have gone into this place in the last ten years — *and stayed there!*"

Thwaite paused dramatically. I never said a word and we sat there in the rear seat of that stationary auto, the leather creaking as we breathed, Rivvin sucking at his pipe, and the leaves dripping above us; not another sound.

"It's all in there," Thwaite began again. "The biggest stack of loot in North America. And this is going to be the biggest and most successful burglary ever perpetrated on this continent. And no one will ever be convicted for it or so much as suspected of it. Mark my words."

"I do," I broke in, "and I don't feel a bit better than when we started. You promised to explain and you said I'd be as eager and confident as you and Rivvin. I acknowledge the bait, admitting all you say is true, and it doesn't seem likely. But do you suppose any recluse millionaire eccentric is going to live unguarded? If he is careless himself his household are the reverse. By what you tell of the gate-houses there are precautions enough. Diamonds are tempting if you like, but so is the bullion in the mint. By your account all this accumulation of treasure is as safe where it is as the gold reserve in the United States Treasury. You scare me, you don't reassure me."

"Keep your head," Thwaite interrupted. "I'm no fool. I've spent years on this scheme. After I was sure of the prize I made sure of the means. There are precautions a-many, but not enough. How simple to put a watchman's cottage every hundred yards on the other side of the road across from the wall? They haven't done it. How simple to light the road and the outside of the wall? They haven't done that. Nor have they thought of any one of the twenty other simple outside precautions. The park's big enough to be lonely. And outside the wall is dark, lonely road and unfenced, empty woods like this. They're overconfident. They think their wall and their gate-houses are enough. And they are not. They think their outside precautions are perfect. They are not. I know. I've been over that wall ten times, twenty times, fifty times. I've risked it and I have risked mantraps and spring guns and alarm wires. There aren't any. There isn't any night patrol, nor any regular day patrol, only casual gardeners and such. I know. I made sure of it by crawling all over the place on my belly like an Iroquois Indian in one of Cooper's novels. They are so confident of the

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potency of their wall that they haven't so much as a watch dog, nor any dog of any kind."

I was certainly startled.

"No dog!" I exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

"Dead sure!" Thwaite returned, triumphantly. "And there never has been a dog on the place."

"How could you be sure of that?" I cavilled.

"I'm coming to that," Thwaite went on. "I could not get anybody who ever belonged to the place to talk, but I managed to arrange to overhear two of them talking to each other; and more than once, too. Most of what they said was no use to me, but I overheard scraps I could piece together. There's a cross-wall that divides the park. In the smaller division, into which the lodge gates lead, are the homes of all the caretakers and servants, of the overseers and manager and of the estate doctor; for there is an estate doctor. He has two assistants, young men, frequently changed. He is married like most of the retinue. There is a sort of village of them inside the outer wall, outside the inner cross-wall. Some of them have been there thirty-five years. When they get too old they are pensioned off and sent away, somewhere; far off, for I could not get a clue to any pensioner.

"The valets or keepers, whichever they are, and there are many of them, to relieve each other, are all unmarried except two or three of the most trusted. The rest are all brought over from England and shipped back usually after four or five years of service. The men I overheard were two of these, an old hand soon to finish his enlistment, as he called it, and go home, and the lad he was training to take his place. All these specials have plenty of time off to spend outside. They'd sit over their beer for two or three hours at a time, chatting on, Appleshaw giving points to Kitworth or Kitworth asking questions. I learned from them about the cross-wall.

" 'Never's been a woman t' other side of it since it was built,' Appleshaw said.

" 'I shouldn't have thought it,' Kitworth ruminated.

" 'Can you imagine a woman,' Appleshaw asked, 'standin' him?'

" 'No,' Kitworth admitted, 'I hardly can. But some women'll stand more'n a man.'

" 'Anyhow,' Appleshaw added, 'he can't abide the sight of a woman.'

" 'Odd,' said Kitworth, 'I've heard his kind are all the other way.'

" 'They are, as we know,' Appleshaw replied, 'havin' watched 'em; but he ain't. He can't endure 'em.'

" 'I suppose it's the same way about dogs,' Kitworth reflected.

" 'No dog'd ever get used to him,' Appleshaw agreed, 'and he's that afraid of dogs, they're not allowed inside the place anywhere. Never's been one here since he was born, I'm told. No, nor any cat, either.'

"Another time I heard Appleshaw say:

" 'He built the museums, and the pavilion and the towers, the rest was

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built before he grew up.'

"Generally I could not hear much of Kitworth's utterances, he talked so low. I once heard Appleshaw reply:

" 'Sometimes nights and nights he'll be quiet as anybody, lights out early and sleep sound for all we know. Again he'll be up all night, every window blazin', or up late, till after midnight. Whoever's on duty sees the night out, nobody else's business, unless they send an alarm for help, and that ain't often; not twice a year. Mostly he's as quiet as you or me, as long as he's obeyed.'

" 'His temper's short though. Now he'll fly into a rage if he's not answered quick; again he'll storm if the watchers come near him uncalled.'

"Of long inaudible whispers I caught fragments. Once:

" 'Oh, then he'll have no one near. You can hear him sobbing like a child. When he's worst you'll hear him, still nights, howlin' and screamin' like a lost soul.'

"Again:

" 'Clean-fleshed as a child and no more hairy than you or me.'

"Again:

" 'Fiddle? No violinist can beat him. I've listened hours. It makes you think of your sins. An' then it'll change an' you remember your first sweetheart, an' spring rains and flowers, an' when you was a child on your mother's knee. It tears your heart out.'

"The two phrases that seemed to mean most were:

" 'He won't stan' interference.'

"And:

" 'Never a lock touched till daylight after he's once locked in.'

"Now what do you think?" Thwaite asked me.

"It sounds," I said, "as if the place were a one-patient asylum for a lunatic with long lucid intervals."

"Something like that," Thwaite answered, "but there seems to be more in it than that. I can't make all the things I hear fit. Appleshaw said one thing that keeps running in my head:

" 'Seein' him in the suds give me a turn.'

"And Kitworth said once:

" 'It was the bright colors alongside of it that made my blood run cold.'

"And Appleshaw said more than once, in varying words, but always with the same meaning tone:

" 'You'll never get over bein' afraid of him. But you'll respect him more and more, you'll almost love him. You won't fear him for his looks, but for his awful wisdom. He's that wise, no man is more so.'

"Once Kitworth answered:

" 'I don't envy Sturry locked in there with him.'

" 'Sturry nor none of us that's his most trusted man for the time bein' is not to be envied,' Appleshaw agreed, 'But you'll come to it, as I have, if you're the man I take you for.'

"That's about all I got from listening," Thwaite went on, "the rest I got from watching and scouting. I made sure of the building they call

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the Pavilion — that's his usual home. But sometimes he spends his nights in one of the towers — they stand all by themselves. Sometimes the lights are all out after ten o'clock or even nine; then again they're on till after midnight. Sometimes they come on late — two o'clock or three. I have heard music too, violin music, as Appleshaw described it, and organ music, too; but no howling. He is certainly a lunatic, judging by the statuary."

"Statuary?" I queried.

"Yes," Thwaite said, "statuary. Big figures and groups, all crazy men with heads like elephants or American eagles, perfectly crazy statuary. But all well-done. They stand all about the park. The little, square building between the Pavilion and the green tower is his sculpture studio."

"You seem to know the place mighty well," I said.

"I do," Thwaite assented, "I've gotten to know it well. At first I tried nights like this. Then I dared starlight. Then I dared even moonlight. I've never had a scare. I've sat on the front steps of the Pavilion at one o'clock of a starlight night and never been challenged. I even tried staying in all day, hiding in some bushes, hoping to see him."

"Ever see him?" I inquired.

"Never," Thwaite answered, "I've heard him though. He rides horseback after dark. I've watched the horse being led up and down in front of the Pavilion, till it got too dark to see it from where I was hid. I've heard it pass me in the dark. But I could never get the horse against the sky to see what was on it. Hiding and getting downhill of a road, close to it, don't go together."

"You didn't see him the day you spent there?" I insisted.

"No," Thwaite said, "I didn't. I was disappointed too. For a big auto purred up to the Pavilion entrance and stood under the *porte cochère*. But when it spun round the park, there was nobody in it — only the chauffeur in front and a pet monkey on the back seat."

"A pet monkey!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "You know how a dog, a Newfoundland, or a terrier, will sit up in an auto and look grand and superior and enjoy himself? Well, that monkey sat there just like that turning his head one way and the other taking in the view."

"What was he like?" I asked.

"Sort of dog-faced ape," Thwaite told me, "more like a mastiff."

Rivvin grunted.

"This isn't business," Thwaite went on, "we've got to get down to business. The point is the wall is their only guard, there's no dog, perhaps because of the pet monkey as much as anything else. They lock Mr. Eversleigh up every night with only one valet to take care of him. They never interfere whatever noise they hear or light they see, unless the alarm is sent out and I have located the alarm wires you are to cut. That's all. Do you go?"

Rivvin was sitting close to me, half on me.

I could feel his great muscles and

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the butt of his pistol against my hip.

"I come with you," I said.

"Of your own accord?" Thwaite insisted.

The butt of that pistol moved as Rivvin breathed.

"I come of my own accord," I said.

Afoot Thwaite led as confidently as he had driven the car. It was the stillest, pitchiest night I ever experienced, without light, air, sound, or smell to guide anyone: through that fog Thwaite sped like a man moving about his own bedroom, never for a second at a loss.

"Here's the place," he said at the wall, and guided my hand to feel the ring-bolt in the grass at its foot. Rivvin made a back for him and I scrambled up on the two. Tip-toe on Thwaite's shoulders I could just finger the coping.

"Stand on my head, you fool!" he whispered.

I clutched the coping. Once astraddle of it, I let down one end of the silk ladder.

"Fast!" breathed Thwaite from below.

I drew it taut and went down. The first sweep of my fingers in the grass found the other ring-bolt. I made the ladder fast and gave it the signal twitches. Rivvin came over first, then Thwaite. Through the park he led evenly. When he halted he caught me by the elbow and asked:

"Can you see any lights?"

"Not a light," I told him.

"Same here," he said, "there are no lights. Every window is dark. We're in luck."

He led again for a while. Stopping he said only:

"Here's where you shin up. Cut every wire, but don't waste time cutting any twice."

The details of his directions were exact. I found every handhold and foothold as he had schooled me. But I needed all my nerve. I realized that no heavyweight like Rivvin or Thwaite could have done it. When I came down I was limp and tottery.

"Just one swallow!" Thwaite said, putting a flask to my lips. Then we went on. The night was so black, the fog so thick that I saw no loom of the building till we were against its wall.

"Here's where you go in," Thwaite directed.

Doubly I understood why I was with them. Neither could have squeezed through that aperture in the stone. I barely managed it. Inside, instead of the sliding crash I had dreaded, I landed with a mere crunch — the coal in that bin was not anthracite. Likewise the bin under the window was for soft coal. I blessed my luck and felt encouraged. The window I got open without too much work. Rivvin and Thwaite slid in. We crunched downhill four or five steps and stood on a firm floor. Rivvin played his flashlight boldly round. We were between a suite of trim coal-bins and a battery of serried furnaces. There was no door at either end of the open space in which we stood. I had a momentary vision of the alternate

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windows and coal chutes above the bins, of two big panels of shiny, colored tiling, of clear brick-work, fresh-painted, jetty iron and dazzling-white brass-ringed asbestos, of a black vacancy between two furnaces. Toward that I half-heard, half-felt Rivvin turn. During the rest of our adventure he led, Thwaite followed, and I mostly tagged or groped after Thwaite, often judging their position by that combination of senses which is neither hearing nor touch, though partly both.

Rivvin's torch flashed again. We were in a cement-floored, brick-walled passage, with a door at each end and on the side facing us doors in a bewildering row. In the darkness that came after the flash I followed the others to the right. Well through the doorway we stood still, breathing and listening. When Rivvin illuminated our environment we saw about us thousands of bottles, all set aslant, neck down, in tiers of racks that reached to the ceiling. Edging between them we made the circuit of the cellar, but found no sign of any door save that by which we had entered. A whispered growl from Rivvin, a nudge from Thwaite, and we went back the full length of the passage. Again we found ourselves in a wine vault, the duplicate of that we had left, and with the same peculiarity.

Our curiosity overcame any prudence. Rivvin, instead of flashing his light at intervals, kept the light steady, and we scrutinized, examined, and whispered our astonishment. As in its fellow there was not in all this vault any spare space; the aisles were narrow, the racks reached the girders supporting the flat arches and every rack was so full that a holder empty of its bottle was scarcely findable. And there was not in all that great cellar, there was not among all those tens of thousands of bottles a magnum, or a quart, or even a pint. They were all splits. We handled a number and all had the same label. I know now what the device was, from seeing it so often and so much larger afterwards, but there it seemed a picture of a skirt-dancer leading an alligator by a dog chain. There was no name of any wine or liquor on any bottle, but each label had a red number — 17 or 45 or 328 — above the picture, and under it: *Bottled for Hengist Eversleigh.*

"We know his name now," Thwaite whispered.

Back in the passage Rivvin took the first door to the left. It brought us to an easy stone stair between walls, which turned twice to the left at broad landings.

Presently Rivvin flashed his light. It showed to our left a carpeted stair, the dull red carpet bulging up over thick pads and held down by brass stair rods; the polished quartered oak of the molded door-jamb or end of wainscot beyond it; the floor-covering of brownish-yellow or yellowish brown linoleum or something similar, made to look like inlaid wood; and the feet, legs, and thighs of a big stocky man. The light shone but the fraction

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of a second, yet it showed plain his knee-breeches, tight stockings on his big calves, and bright buckles at his knees and on his low shoes.

There was no loud sound, but the blurred brushy noise of a mute struggle. I backed against a window sill and could back no further. All I could hear was the shuffling, rasping sounds of the fight, and panting that became a sort of gurgle.

Again the light flashed and stayed full bright. I saw that it was Thwaite struggling with the man, and that one of the man's big hands was on Thwaite's throat. Thwaite had him round the neck and his face was against Thwaite's chest. His hair was brownish. Rivvin's slung-shot crunched horribly on the man's skull. Instantly the light went out.

Thwaite, radiating heat like a stove, stood gasping close by me. I heard no other noise after the body thudded on the floor except that on the carpeted stair I seemed to hear light treads, as it were of a big dog or of a frightened child, padding away upward.

"Did you hear anything?" I whispered.

Rivvin punched me.

After Thwaite was breathing naturally, he turned on his torch and Rivvin did the same.

The dead man was oldish, over-fifty I should judge, tall, large in all his dimensions, and spare, though heavy. His clothing was a gold-laced livery of green velvet, with green velvet knee-breeches, green silk stockings and green leather pumps. The four buckles were gold.

Thwaite startled me by speaking out loud.

"I take it, Rivvin," he said, "this is the trusted valet. He would have yelled if there had been anybody to call. Either we have this building to ourselves or we have no one to deal with now except Mr. Hengist Eversleigh."

Rivvin grunted.

"If he is here," Thwaite went on, "he's trying to send the alarm over the cut wires, or he's frightened and hiding. Let's find him and finish him, and then find his diamonds. Anyway, let's find those diamonds."

Rivvin grunted.

Swiftly they led from room to room and floor to floor. Not a door resisted. We had been curious and astonished in the wine-vaults; above we were electrified and numb. We were in a palace of wonders, among such a profusion of valuables that even Rivvin, after the second or third opportunity, ceased any attempt to pocket or bag anything. We came upon nothing living, found no door locked and apparently made the tour of the entire building.

When they halted, I halted. We were delirious with amazement, frantic with inquisitiveness, frenzied with curiosity, incredulous, hysterical, dazed, and quivering.

Thwaite spoke in the dark.

"I'm going to see this place plain, all over it, if I die for it."

They flashed their torches. We were right beside the body of the murdered

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footman. Rivvin and Thwaite did not seem to mind the corpse. They waved their torches until one fell on an electric-light button.

"Hope those wires are underground," Thwaite remarked. He pushed the button and the electric lights came on full and strong. We were apparently at the foot of the backstairs, in a sort of lobby, an expanded passage way out of which opened several doors.

We all three regarded the knobs of those doors. As we had half seen by flashlight, every door had two knobs, one like any door-knob, the other about halfway between it and the floor. Rivvin opened one which proved to lead into a broom closet. He tried the knobs. The lock and latch were at the upper knob, but controlled by either knob indifferently. They tried another door, but my eyes would roam to the dead body.

Rivvin and Thwaite paid no more attention to it than if it had not been there. I had never seen but one killed man before and neither wanted to be reminded of that one nor relished the sight of this one. I stared down the blackness of the stone stair up which we had come or glanced into the dimness of the padded stairway.

Then Rivvin, feeling inside the open door, found the button and turned on the lights. It was a biggish dining-room, the four corners cut off by inset glass-framed shelved closets, full of china and glassware. The furniture was oak.

"Servants' dining-room," Thwaite commented.

Turning on the lights in each we went through a series of rooms; a sort of sitting-room, with cardtables and checker-boards; a library walled with bookcases and open book shelves, its two stout oak tables littered with magazines and newspapers; a billiard room with three tables — a billiard-table, a pool-table, and one for bagatelle; a sort of lounging room, all leather-covered sofas and deep armchairs; an entry with hat-hooks and umbrella-stands, the outer door dark oak with a great deal of stained glass set in and around it.

"All servants' rooms," Thwaite commented. "Every bit of the furniture is natural man-size. Let's go on."

Back we went along a passage and into a big kitchen beyond the dining-room.

"Never mind the pantries till we come down again," Thwaite commanded. "Let's go upstairs. We'll do the banqueting-hall after those bedrooms, and the writing rooms and study last. I want a real sight of those pictures."

They passed the dead flunkey as if he had not been there at all.

On the floor above Thwaite touched Rivvin's elbow.

"I forgot these," he said.

We inspected a medium-sized sitting room with a round center-table, an armchair drawn up by it, and in the armchair a magazine and a sort of wadded smoking-jacket. Next this room was a bedroom and a bathroom.

"Mr. Footman's quarters," Thwaite

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remarked, staring unconcernedly at a photograph of a dumpy young woman and two small children, set on the bureau. "All man-size furniture here, too."

Rivvin nodded.

Up the second flight of that backstair we went again. It ended in a squarish hallway with nothing in it but two settees. It had two doors.

Rivvin pushed one open, felt up and down for the electric button and found it.

We all three gasped; we almost shouted. We had had glimpses of this gallery before, but the flood of light from a thousand bulbs under inverted trough-reflectors dazzled us; the pictures fairly petrified us.

The glare terrified me.

"Surely we are crazy," I objected, "to make all this illumination. It's certain to give the alarm."

"Alarm nothing," Thwaite snapped. "Haven't I watched these buildings night after night. I told you he is never disturbed at any hour, lights or no lights."

My feeble protest thus brushed away, I became absorbed like the others in those incredible paintings. Rivvin was merely stupidly dazed in uncomprehending wonder; Thwaite, keenly speculative, questing for a clue to the origin of their peculiarities; I totally bewildered at the perfection of their execution, shivering at their uncanniness.

The gallery was all of ninety feet long, nearly thirty wide and high. Apparently it had a glass roof above the rectangle of reflectors. The pictures covered all four walls, except the little door at either end. None was very small and several were very large. A few were landscapes, but all had figures in them.

Those figures!

They were human figures, but not one had a human head. The heads were invariably those of birds, animals or fishes, generally of animals, some of common animals, many of creatures I had seen pictures of or had heard of, some of imaginary creatures like dragons or griffons — more than half of the heads either of animals I knew nothing of or which had been invented by the painter.

Close to me when the lights blazed out was a sea picture — blurred grayish foggy weather and a heavy groundswell; a strange other-world open boat with fish heaped in the bottom of it and standing among them four human figures in shining boots like rubber boots and wet, shiny, loose coats like oilskins, only the boots and skins were red as claret, and the four figures had hyenas' heads. One was steering and the others were hauling at a net. Caught in the net was a sort of merman, but different from the pictures of mermaids. His shape was all human except the head and hands and feet; every bit of him was covered with fish-scales, all rainbowy. He had flat broad fins in place of hands and feet and his head was the head of a fat hog. He was thrashing about in the net in an agony of impotent effort. Queer as the picture was, it had a compelling

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impression of reality, as if the scene were actually happening before our eyes.

Next it was a picnic in a little meadow by a pond between woods with mountains behind it higher up. Every one of the picnickers about the white tablecloth spread on the grass had the head of a different animal — one of a sheep, one of a camel, and the rest of animals like deer, not one of them known to me.

Then next to that was a fight of two compound creatures shaped like centaurs, only they had bulls' bodies, with human torsos growing out of them, where the necks ought to be, the arms scaly snakes with open-mouthed, biting heads in place of hands; and instead of human heads roosters' heads, bills open and pecking. Under the creatures in place of bulls' hoofs were yellow roosters' legs, stouter than chickens' legs and with short thick toes, and long sharp spurs like game roosters'. Yet these fantastic chimeras appeared altogether alive and their movements looked natural — yes, that's the word, natural.

Every picture was as complete a staggerer as these first three. Every one was signed in the lower left hand corner in neat smallish letters of bright gold paint: *Hengist Eversleigh.*

"Mr. Hengist Eversleigh is a lunatic, that's certain," Thwaite commented, "but he unquestionably knows how to paint."

There must have been more than fifty pictures in that gallery, maybe as many as seventy-five, and every one a nightmare.

Beyond was a shorter gallery of the same width, end on to the side of the first, and beyond that the duplicate of the first; the three taking up three sides of the building. The fourth side was a studio, the size of the second gallery; it had a great skylight of glass tilted sideways over one whole wall. It was whitewashed, very plain and empty-looking, with two easels, a big one and a little one.

On the little one was a picture of some vegetables and five or six little fairies, as it were, with children's bodies and mice's heads, nibbling at a carrot.

On the big one was a canvas mostly blank. One side of it had a palm-tree in splashy, thick slaps of paint and under it three big crabs with coconuts in their claws. A man's feet and legs showed beside them and the rest was unfinished.

The three galleries had fully three hundred paintings, for the smaller gallery contained only small canvases. Besides being impressed with the grotesqueness of the subjects and the perfection of the drawing and coloring, two things struck me as to the pictures collectively.

First, there was not represented in any one of all those paintings any figure of a woman or any female shape of any kind. The beast-headed figures were all, whether clothed or nude, figures of men. The animals, as far as I could see, were all males.

Secondly, nearly half the pictures were modifications, or parallels or

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emulations (I could hardly say travesties or imitations), of well-known pictures by great artists, paintings I had seen in public galleries or knew from engravings or photographs or reproductions in books or magazines.

There was a picture like Washington crossing the Delaware and another like Washington saying farewell to his generals. There was a batch of Napoleon pictures; after the paintings of Napoleon at Austerlitz, at Friedland, giving the eagles to his regiments, on the morning of Waterloo, coming down the steps at Fontainebleau, and on the deck of the ship going to St. Helena. There were dozens of other pictures of generals or kings or emperors reviewing victorious armies; two or three of Lincoln. One that hit me hardest, obviously after some picture I had never seen or heard of, of the ghost of Lincoln, far larger than a life-size man, towering above the surviving notabilities of his time on the grandstand reviewing the homecoming Federal army marching through Washington.

In every one of these pictures, the dominant figure — whether it stood for Lincoln, Napoleon, Washington, or some other general or ruler, whatever uniform or regalia clothed its human shape — had the same head. The heads of the fighting men in all these pictures were those of dogs, all alike in any one picture, but differing from one to another; terriers or wolfhounds or mastiffs or whatnot. The heads of any men not soldiers were those of oxen or sheep or horses or some other mild sort of animal. The head of the dominant figure I took to be invented, legendary, fabulous — oh, that's not the word I want.

("Mythological?" I suggested, the only interruption I interjected into his entire narrative.)

Yes, mythological. The long-jawed head, like a hound's; the little pointed yellow beard under the chin; the black, naked ears, like a hairless dog's ears and yet not doggy, either; the ridge of hair on top of the skull; the triangular shape of the whole head; the close-set, small, beady, terribly knowing eyes; the brilliant patches of color on either side of the muzzle; all these made a piercing impression of individuality and yet seemed not so much actual as mythological.

It takes a great deal longer to tell what we saw on that third floor than it took to see it. All round the galleries under the pictures were cases of drawers, solidly built in one length like a counter and about as high. Thwaite went down one side of the gallery and Rivvin down the other, pulling them out and slamming them shut again. All I saw held photographs of pictures. But Rivvin and Thwaite were taking no chances and looked into every drawer. I had plenty of time to gaze about me and circulated at a sort of cantering trot around the green-velvet miniature sofas and settees placed back to back down the middle of the floor-space. It seemed to me that Mr. Hengist Eversleigh was a great master of figure and landscape drawing, color, light, and perspective.

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As we went down the duplicate staircase at the other corner from where we came up Thwaite said:

"Now for those bedrooms."

By the stair we found another valet's or footman's apartment, sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom, just like the one by the other stair. And there were four more between them, under the studio and over the lounging-rooms.

On the east and west sides of the building were twelve apartments, six on each side, each of the twelve made up of a bedroom, a dressing-room and a bathroom.

The beds were about three feet long, and proportionately narrow and low. The furniture, bureaus, tables, chairs, chests-of-drawers and the rest, harmonized with the dimensions of the beds, except the cheval-glasses and wall-mirrors which reached the ceilings. The bathtubs were almost pools, about nine feet by six and all of three feet deep, each a single block of porcelain.

The shapes and sizes and styles of the furniture were duplicated all through, but the colors varied, so that the twelve suites were in twelve colors; black, white, gray, brown, light and dark yellow, red, green, blue and others, wall coverings, hangings, carpets and rugs all to match in each suite. The panels of the walls had the same picture, however, repeated over and over, two, four or six times to a room and in every suit alike.

This picture was the design I had failed to make out on the labels of the bottles. It was set as a medallion in each panel of the walls. The background of the picture was a vague sort of palish sky and blurred, hazy clouds above tropical-looking foliage. The chief figure was an angel, in flowing white robes, floating on silvery-plumed wings widespread. The angel's face was a human face, the only human face in any picture in that palace, the face of a grave, gentle, rather girlish young man.

The creature the angel was leading was a huge, bulky crocodile, with a gold collar about its neck, and a gold chain from that, not to the angel's hand, but to a gold fetter about his wrist.

Under each picture was a verse of four lines, always the same.

Let not your baser nature drag you down.
Utter no whimper, not one sigh or moan,
Hopeless of respite, solace, palm or crown
Live out your life unflinching and alone.

I saw it so often I shall never forget it.

The bathrooms were luxurious in the extreme, a needle-bath, a shower-bath, two basins of different sizes in each, besides the sunk pool-tub. The dressing-rooms has each a variety of wardrobes. One or two we opened, finding in each several suits of little clothes, as if for a boy under six years old. One closet had shelf above shelf of small shoes, not much over four

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inches long.

"Evidently," Thwaite remarked, "Hengist Eversleigh is a dwarf, whatever else he is."

Rivvin left the wardrobes and closets alone after the first few.

Each bedroom had in it nothing but the bed and on each side of it a sort of wine-cooler, like a pail with a lid, but bigger, set on three short legs so that its top was level with the bed. We opened most of them; every one we opened was filled with ice, bedded in which were several half-pint bottles. Every one of the twelve beds had the covers carefully turned down. Not one showed any sign of having been occupied. The wine-coolers were solid silver but we left them where they were. As Thwaite remarked, it would have taken two full-sized freight cars to contain the silver we had seen.

In the dressing-rooms the articles like brushes and combs on the bureaus were all of gold, and most set with jewels. Rivvin began to fill a bag with those entirely of metal, but even he made no attempt to tear the backs off the brushes or to waste energy on any other breakage. By the time we had scanned the twelve suites Rivvin could barely carry his bag.

The front room on the south side of the building was a library full of small, showily-bound books in glass-fronted cases all the way to the ceiling, covering every wall except where the two doors and six windows opened. There were small, narrow tables, the height of those in the dressing-rooms. There were magazines on them and papers. Thwaite opened a bookcase and I another and we looked at three or four books. Each had in it a bookplate with the device of the angel and the crocodile.

Rivvin did not find the electric button in the main hallway and we went down the great broad, curving stair by flashlight. Rivvin turned to the left and we found ourselves in the banquet hall, as Thwaite had called it, a room all of forty by thirty and gorgeous beyond any description.

The diminutive table, not three feet square, was a slab of crystal-white glass set on silver-covered legs. The tiny armchair, the only chair in the big room, was solid silver, with a crimson cushion loose in it.

The sideboards and glass-fronted closets paralyzed us. One had fine china and cut-glass; wonderful china and glass. But four held a table service of gold, all of pure gold; forks, knives, spoons, plates, bowls, platters, cups, everything; all miniature. All the pieces were normal in shape except that instead of wine-glasses, goblets, and tumblers were things like broad gravyboats on stems or short feet, all lopsided, with one projecting edge like the mouth of a pitcher, only broader and flatter. There were dozens of these. Rivvin filled two bags with what two bags would hold. The three bags were all we could carry, and must have been over a hundred and fifty pounds apiece.

"We'll have to make two trips to the wall," Thwaite said. "You brought six bags, didn't you, Rivvin?"

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Rivvin grunted.

At the foot of the grand staircase Rivvin found the electric button and flooded the magnificent stairway with light.

The stair itself was all white marble, the rails yellow marble, and the paneling of the dado malachite. But the main feature was the painting above the landing. This was the most amazing of all the paintings we had come upon.

This picture was about twenty feet wide and higher than its width. There was a throne, a carved and jeweled throne, set on an eminence. There was a wide view on either side of the throne, and all filled with human figures with animal heads, an infinite throng, all facing the throne. Nearest it were figures that seemed meant for all the presidents and kings and queens and emperors of the world. I recognized the robes or uniforms of some of them. Some had heads taken from their national coat of arms, like the heads of the Austrian and Russian eagles. All these figures were paying homage to the figure that stood before the throne; the same monster we had seen in place of Lincoln or Washington or Napoleon in the paintings upstairs.

He stood proudly with one foot on a massive crocodile. He was dressed in a sort of revolutionary uniform, low shoes, with gold buckles, white stockings and knee-breeches, a red waistcoat, and a bright blue coat. His head was the same beast-head of the other pictures, triangular and strange. Above and behind the throne floated on outspread silver wings the white-robed angel with the Sir Galahad face.

Rivvin shut off the lights almost instantly, but even in the few breaths while I looked I saw it all.

The three sacks of swag we put down by the front door.

The room opposite the banquet hall was a music-room, with an organ and a piano, both with keys and keyboards far smaller than usual; great cases of music books; an array of brass instruments and cellos and more than a hundred violin cases. Thwaite opened one or two.

"These'd be enough to make our fortune," he said. "If we could get away with them."

Beyond the music-room was the study. It had in it four desks, miniature in size and the old-fashioned model with drawers below, a lid to turn down and form a writing surface, and a sort of bookcase above with a peaked top. All were carved and on the lids in the carving we read:

JOURNAL
MUSIC
CRITICISM
BUSINESS

Thwaite opended the desk marked BUSINESS and pulled open the drawers.

In pigeonholes of the desk were bundles of new, clean greenbacks and treasury notes of higher denominations; five each of fives, tens, twenties, fifties, and hundreds. Thwaite tossed one bundle of each to me and Rivvin

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and then he pocketed the rest.

He bulged.

One drawer had a division down the middle. One half was full of ten-dollar gold pieces, the other half of twenties.

"I've heard of misers," said Thwaite, "but this beats hell. Think of that crazy dwarf, a prisoner in this palace, running his hands through this and gloating over the cash he can never use."

Rivvin loaded a bag with the coins and when he had them all he could barely lift the bag. Leaving it where it lay before the desk, he strode the length of the room and tried the door at the end.

It was fast.

Instantly Rivvin and Thwaite were like two terriers after a rat.

"This is where the diamonds are," Thwaite declared, "and Mr. Hengist Eversleigh is in there with them."

He and Rivvin conferred a while together.

"You kneel low," Thwaite whispered. "Duck when you open it. He'll fire over you. Then you've got him. See?"

Rivvin tip-toed to the door, knelt, and tried key after key in the lock. On the other side of the doorway Thwaite stood, his finger at the electric button. Each had his slung-shot in his left hand. They had spun the cylinders of their revolvers and stuck them in their belts in front before Rivvin began work on the lock.

I heard a click.

Rivvin put up his hand.

The lights went out.

In the black dark we stood until I could almost see the outlines of the windows; less black against the intenser blackness.

Soon I heard another click, and the grate of an opened door.

Then a kind of snarl, a thump like a blow, a sort of strangling gasp, and the cushiony sounds of a struggle.

Thwaite turned on the lights.

Rivvin was in the act of staggering up from his knees. I saw a pair of small, pink hands, the fingers intertwined, locked behind Rivvin's neck. They slipped apart as I caught sight of them.

I had a vision of small feet in little patent leather silver-buckled low shoes, of green socks, of diminutive legs in white trousers flashing right and left in front of Rivvin, as if he held by the throat a struggling child.

Next I saw that Rivvin's arms were thrown up, wide apart. He collapsed and fell back his full length with a dull crash.

Then I saw the snout!

Saw the wolf-jaws vised on Rivvin's throat!

Saw the blood welling round the dazzling white fangs, and recognized the reality of the sinister head I had seen over and over in his pictures.

Rivvin made the fish-out-of-water contortions of a man being killed.

Thwaite brought his slung-shot down on the beast-head skull.

The blow was enough to crush in a steel cylinder.

The beast wrinkled its snout and shook its head from side to side, worry-

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ing like a bull-dog at Rivvin's throat.

Again Thwaite struck, and again and again. At each blow the portentous head oscillated viciously. The awful thing about it to me was the two blue bosses on each side of the muzzle, like enamel, shiny and hard-looking; and the hideous welt of red, like fresh sealing-wax, down between them and along the snout.

Rivvin's struggles grew weaker as the great teeth tore at his throat. He was dead before Thwaite's repeated blows drove in the splintered skull and the clenched jaws relaxed, the snout crinkling and contracting as the dog-teeth slid from their hold.

Thwaite gave the monster two or three more blows, touched Rivvin, and fairly dashed out of the room, shouting.

"You stay here!"

I heard the sound of prying and sawing. Alone, I looked but once at the dead cracksman.

The thing that had killed him was the size of a four- to six-year-old child, but more stockily built; it looked entirely human up to the neck, and was dressed in a coat of bright dark blue, a vest of crimson velvet, and white duck trousers. As I looked, the muzzle wriggled for the last time, the jaws fell apart, and the carcass rolled sideways. It was the very duplicate in miniature of the figure in the big picture on the staircase landing.

Thwaite came dashing back. Without any sign of qualm he searched Rivvin and tossed me two or three bundles of greenbacks.

He stood up.

He laughed.

"Curiosity," he said, "will be the death of me."

Then he stripped the clothing from the dead monster, kneeling by it.

The beast-hair stopped at the shirt collar. Below that the skin was human, as was the shape — the shape of a forty-year-old man, strong and vigorous and well-made, only dwarfed to the smallness of a child.

Across the hairy breast was tattooed in blue: HENGIST EVERSLEIGH.

"Hell," said Thwaite.

He stood up and went to the fatal door. Inside he found the electric button.

The room was small and lined with cases of little drawers, tier on tier, rows of brass knobs on mahogany.

Thwaite opened one.

It was velvet-lined and grooved like a jeweler's tray and contained rings, the stones apparently emeralds. Thwaite dumped them into one of the empty bags he had taken from Rivvin's corpse.

The next case was of similar drawers of rings set with rubies. The first of these Thwaite dumped in with the emeralds.

But then he flew round the room, pulling out drawers and slamming them shut, until he came upon trays of unset diamonds. These he emptied into his sack to the last of them, then diamond rings on them, other jewelry set with diamonds, then rubies and emeralds till the sack was full.

He tied its neck, had me open a sec-

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ond sack and was dumping drawer after drawer into that when suddenly he stopped.

His nose worked — worked horridly like that of the dead monster.

I thought he was going crazy and was beginning to laugh nervously when he said:

"Smell!"

I sniffed.

"I smell smoke," I said.

"So do I," he agreed. "This place is afire!"

"And we locked in!" I exclaimed.

"Locked in?" he sneered. "Bosh. I broke open the front door the instant I was sure they were dead. Come! Drop that empty bag. This is no time for haggling."

We had to step between the two corpses. Rivvin was horribly dead. The colors had all faded from the snout. The muzzle was mouse-color.

When we had hold of the bag of coins, Thwaite turned off the electric lights and we struggled out with that and the bag of jewels, and went out into the hallway full of smoke.

"We can carry only these," Thwaite warned me. "We'll have to leave the rest."

I shouldered the bag of coins, and followed him down the steps, across a gravel road, and, oh the relief of treading turf and feeling the fog all about me.

At the wall Thwaite turned and looked back.

"No chance to try for those other bags," he said.

The red glow was visible at that distance and was fast becoming a glare.

I heard shouts.

We got the bags over the wall and reached the car. Thwaite started at once. Where we went I could not guess, nor even how long. Ours was the only car on the roads. When the dawn light was near enough for me to see, Thwaite stopped the car.

He turned to me.

"Get out!" he said.

"What?" I asked.

He shoved his pistol muzzle in my face.

"You've fifty thousand dollars in bank bills in your pockets," he said. "It's a half a mile down that road to a railway station. Get out!"

I got out.

The car shot forward into the morning fog and was gone.

He was silent a long time.

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"Headed for New York," he said, "and got on a drunk. When I came round, I had barely eleven thousand dollars. I headed for Cook's office and bargained for a ten-thousand-dollar tour of the world, the most places and the longest time they'd give for the money — the whole cost on them, I not to need a cent after I started."

"What date was that?" I asked.

He meditated and gave me some approximate indications, rather rambling and roundabout.

"What did you do after you left Cook's?" I asked.

"I put a hundred dollars in a savings

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bank," he said. "Bought a lot of clothes and things and started. I kept pretty sober all round the world because the only way to get full was by being treated and I had no cash to treat back with. When I landed in New York I thought I was all right for life. But no sooner did I have my hundred dollars in my pocket than I got full again. I don't seem able to keep sober."

"Are you sober now?" I asked.

"Sure," he asserted.

He seemed to shed his cosmopolitan vocabulary the moment he came back to everyday matters.

"Let's see you write what I tell you on this," I suggested, handing him a fountain pen and a torn envelope, turned inside out.

Word by word after my dictation he wrote:

"Until you hear from me again
Yours truly,
No Name."

I took the paper from him and studied the handwriting.

"How long were you on that spree?" I asked.

"Which?" he twinkled.

"Before you came to and had only eleven thousand dollars left," I explained.

"I don't know," he said, "I didn't know anything I had been doing."

"I can tell you one thing you did," I said.

"What?" he queried.

"You put four packets, each of one hundred hundred-dollar bills, in a thin manila clasp-envelope, directed it to a New York lawyer and mailed the envelope to him with no letter in it, only a half-sheet of dirty paper with nothing on it except: 'Keep this for me until I ask for it,' and the signature you have just written."

"Honest?" he enunciated incredulously.

"Fact!" I said.

"Then you believe what I've told you," he exclaimed joyfully.

"Not a bit I don't."

"How's that?" he asked.

"If you were drunk enough," I explained, "to risk forty thousand dollars in that crazy way, you were drunk enough to dream all the complicated nightmare you have spun out to me."

"If I did," he argued, "how did I get the fifty thousand odd dollars?"

"I'm willing to suppose you got it with no more dishonesty on your part," I told him, "than if you had come by it as you described."

"It makes me mad you won't believe me," he said.

He gloomed in silence. Presently he said:

"I can stand looking at him now," and led the way to the cage where the big blue-nosed mandrill chattered his inarticulate bestialities and scratched himself intermittently.

He stared at the brute.

"And you don't believe me?" he regretted.

"No, I don't," I said, "and I'm not going to. The thing's incredible."

"Couldn't there be a mongrel, a hybrid?" he suggested.

"Put that out of your head," I told

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him, "the whole thing's incredible."

"Suppose she'd seen a critter like this," he persisted, "just at the wrong time?"

"Bosh!" I said. "Old wives' tales! Superstition! Impossibility!"

"His head," he declared, "was just like that." He shuddered.

"Somebody put drops in your drink," I suggested. "Anyhow, let's talk about something else. Come and have lunch with me."

Over the lunch I asked him:

"What city did you like best of all you saw?"

"Paris for mine," he grinned, "Paris forever."

"I tell you what I advise you to do," I said.

"What's that?" he asked, his eyes bright on mine.

"Let me buy you an annuity with your forty thousand," I explained, "an annuity payable in Paris. There's enough interest already to pay your way to Paris and leave you some cash till the first quarterly payment comes due."

"You wouldn't feel yourself defrauding the Eversleighs?" he questioned.

"If I'm defrauding any people," I said, "I don't know who they are."

"How about the fire?" he insisted. "I'll bet you heard of it. Don't the dates agree?"

"The dates agree," I admitted. "And the servants were all dismissed, the remaining buildings and walls torn down and the place cut up and sold in portions just about as it would have been if your story were true."

"There now!" he ejaculated. "You do believe me!"

"I do not!" I insisted. "And the proof is that I'm ready to carry out my annuity plan for you."

"I agree," he said, and stood up from the lunch table.

"Where are we going now?" he inquired as we left the restaurant.

"Just you come with me," I told him, "and ask no questions."

I piloted him to the Museum of Archaeology and led him circuitously to what I meant for an experiment on him. I dwelt on other subjects nearby and waited for him to see it himself.

He saw.

He grabbed me by the arm.

"That's him!" he whispered. "Not the size, but his very expression, in all his pictures."

He pointed to that magnificent, enigmatical black-diorite twelfth-dynasty statue which represents neither Anubis nor Seth, but some nameless cynocephalus god.

"That's him," he repeated. "Look at the awful wisdom of him."

I said nothing.

"And you brought me here!" he cried. "You meant me to see this! You do believe!"

"No," I maintained. "I do not believe."

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Most of you have noticed that George Salter's cover designs for EQMM never had any connection whatever with the stories inside — or, as the legal phrase goes, any resemblance between a Salter cover and one of the stories selected by your Editor is purely coincidental. The reason for this lack of coordination between picture and text is really quite simple: Production difficulties make it necessary for the cover design to be drawn and plated long before the contents of each issue is definitely decided upon.

Now, one day our Managing Editor, Mildred Falk, got an idea. Why not, she asked, capitalize on this illogical state of affairs? Why not give our readers an opportunity to fictionize Mr. Salter's imaginative and gory crime pictures? It is an established fact that most dyed-in-the-blood fans have a secret yen to write detective stories themselves. Why not give them a chance?

No sooner suggested than done! Here's your golden opportunity to become a writer — golden to the tune of $100.00 in cash! All you have to do is write a short-short story — only three pages of manuscript! — about this month's cover. For the best story submitted we will pay $100.00 — and print the story in EQMM!

Here are the simple rules:

(1) The plot of your story must tie in closely with this month's cover.

(2) Your story must not exceed 1,000 words.

(3) The prize-winning story will be judged on the basis of aptness to the cover, ingenuity of plot, and smoothness of expression. The editorial staff of EQMM will serve as judges and their decision will be accepted as final; in case of ties, however, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

(4) Your entry must be postmarked no later than April 6, 1948 and the winning story will be published in our July issue, on sale June 7, 1948.

(5) No entries will be returned.

(6) The contest is open to everybody except employees of this publishing house and their relatives.

And one last condition, which is more a request than a rule:

(7) We ask all professional writers to please refrain from making submissions — their training and experience would give them too great an advantage. This contest is planned for amateur writers — for the detective-story fans to whom we all owe so much. Give them a chance to win!

Mail your story to: Ellery Queen's Cover Contest
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DEATH ON THE OFFBEAT

by JOHN WIGGIN

WHEN I went into the society end of the music racket, some years ago, I learned two things right away. The first thing was to forget I was ever a hot-style pianist. The customers at debutante balls, Junior League affairs, and uptown private parties like their music simple, so I learned to play strictly oom-pah.

The second thing I learned was never to mess around with the customers. That isn't as easy as it sounds. Some of those little biddies out of finishing school would just as soon get amorous about a musician as anybody else. And that's really poison. Keep away from those society dolls, I say. You get mixed up with them, and you just get your feet into a lot of muddy water. Dipsy Dorgan found that out, but he was slow learning. By the time he did, he was facing a murder rap.

It was too bad, because Dipsy Dorgan will rate up among the greatest trumpet players of all time. A great hot-man like him had even less business than I had going into society work, where his talent wasn't really appreciated. But, like me, he sort of drifted into it, and stayed with it, because it was a good living.

But there was one catch in it. Dipsy was very dumb about the way he handled the customers. You see, he is the tall, blond, handsome type, and those little society dolls couldn't keep their hands off of him. He hadn't been playing private parties very long before the word got around the Junior League, and that was the beginning of Dipsy's downfall. Pretty soon, it got to be the regular thing for some rich mouse to come around the bandstand and put the arm on him. Sooner or later, there would be trouble, and Dipsy began to get nothing but a bad name with the mommas and the poppas. He couldn't help it that he was too dumb to know he was just a sucker for a wrong look.

I didn't see him for a long time, until one day, late in the summer, I bumped into him at Hurley's Bar. He hadn't worked for two months, and he was broke. I felt so sorry for the kid that when I got a call the next day to take a small band out to Long Island, I decided to give him another chance.

The thing out on Long Island was a going-away party for Beth Bradley. She was leaving for Paris to take some courses at that Sorbonne school they have over there, so her parents wanted her to have a blowout before she went. They put it on out at their estate near Little Neck. Pa Bradley had a dance floor built out back of the house, right handy to the kitchen, and they invited about a hundred people.

For some reason, good men were

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hard to find that night, and I landed out there with an awful gang of tramps. There were ten in the band: seven bums, Dipsy and I, and a young drummer by the name of Eddy Moore who is very good. But it wasn't so bad. People of that kind don't know good music when they hear it anyway, so my bunch of clowns got over all right.

Old Pa Bradley was a good guy and provided champagne for the band. I didn't have any because I was head man, and I wanted to do a good job; and to my great surprise, Dipsy turned down the fizz water too. Later on, about three o'clock, he came and asked me if he could nurse along a scotch and soda. He said his lip was tired and he was blowing himself out. I told him hell yes.

About half-past three that party was really swingin'. There weren't more than half a dozen couples on the floor at any one time. The rest were whooping around the grounds, and some of them weren't making any noise at all. I say half-past three, because I remember looking at my watch and thinking how tough it was to have to wait another hour and a half before I could have a drink. We were hired to play until five o'clock, and at the time that seemed like a hell of a long time to go thirsty.

So as I say, I was looking at my watch at half-past three, and then I looked out at the dancers and wondered where everybody was. There were just five couples out there then. Two of those couples were strangers to me; the other three I knew. First, there was Beth Bradley, a nice blue-eyed, clean-looking girl. She was dancing with a real screwball, a young Princeton kid named Norval Frentrup. He was tall, and had bushy black hair and he always looked as if he were sore about something.

Then there was Beth's blond brother, Edgar, a clean-cut, good-natured-looking boy who looked like his sister. His partner was a slinky glamor-girl named Candace Armour. The first name rhymes with Tracy, and she was really some girl, that Candace. You know the kind — they might be Irish, but they'd rather look Spanish. She had those full lips, and kind of smoldering eyes, and a lot of black hair that hung way down her bare back.

The third couple was a very cute little girl named Constance Canning, and her fiancé, who of all people was a band leader. Anton Gordon had been around several years and was very popular with the carriage trade. I knew him slightly and didn't care for him, but then I wouldn't. He was one of those slender slickers who play Hungarian tangos very badly on a fiddle, but who look good while they're doing it, and bow from the waist afterward. Society folks go nuts about his type. Well, this little Canning girl went so nuts that she got herself engaged to the guy.

I wouldn't have thought that was so smart for her, but it was mighty nice for Anton Gordon. He was marrying into an awful mess of dollars.

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While I was watching Anton and his girl friend, there was a big whoop, and Candace Armour started running unsteadily across the dance floor dragging Edgar Bradley with her.

"Anton!" she screamed, in an awful, raucous voice. "Anton, listen! Edgar doesn't want to dance with me any more; he wants to dance with Connie, so you've got to let him, and then you dance with me. Anton, you got to. Edgar's in love with Connie, only he's too bashful to let on about it, so be magnanimous and go ahead and let him dance with her."

Candace was lit. Edgar was sort of standing to one side with astonishment written all over his face. He made some feeble motions of denying the whole thing, but Anton came through and kind of saved the situation by bowing elegantly and turning Connie over to Edgar. Then he put his arms around Candace and swept her off in the opposite direction.

I yelled over my shoulder to the band to *segue* into Dipsy Doodle. I figured Candace needed exercise, and with Dipsy Dorgan and Eddy Moore to give her the beat, she would get it. Beth Bradley gave me a grateful look as she danced by with Norval Frentrup. His face just then was a picture. In fact, it was like some of the faces you see in old daguerreotypes of those young Confederate officers. The blazing-eyed type. His eyes were blazing at Candace right then. I recall thinking to myself: Why should that Frentrup kid look so annoyed at a drunken dame? Drink and let drink is my motto. But right there Dorgan picked up his solo on *Dipsy Doodle*, and he really got off. By the time we finished the number the crowd was all coming back onto the dance floor.

Up to this point, everything about the party was perfectly normal. Candace was drunk and disorderly but so what? Beth Bradley had had plenty but she was holding it well, and as for Frentrup, you couldn't tell he wasn't drunk if you saw him sober. As I say, up to now, the party was perfectly normal, but then a couple of little things happened that were annoying, and at the same time were a littly spooky.

In the first place, after we finished *Dipsy Doodle*, we started a full arrangement of a slow number, *Thanks for the Memory*. And on the very first chord, this yokel I have playing tenor sax delivered a nice clinker. He played a B flat instead of a B natural, which changes that bright opening chord into a gloomy minor one. I shuddered; I didn't even look around. I wondered what he would do to mess up the eight-bar solo he had coming up in the last chorus. When he came to it, the big ham elected to play it hot. He honked out the first four bars of *Taps* in rhythm. My hair stood straight on end, and I lifted my hands off the keyboard for the moment. Musically, *Taps* fit that place in the tune we were playing — after a fashion — but any musician will tell you it's extremely bad luck to play it unless you're playing it for

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someone who's dead.

I was thinking up some choice words to hand that tenor man, when Eddy Moore, the drummer, yelled over at me.

"Hey, Johnny," he yelled, "I just got a request."

"Well, what is it?" I snapped. Eddy is the nuts as a drummer, but he's awful vague.

"Oh!" he said — he just remembered he hadn't told me the title — "Somebody wants to hear *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You.*"

I suppose that title should have made my scalp crawl, but it didn't. It's a good old barrel-house number, and the fact that it was requested didn't strike me as odd.

"Okay, boys!" I shouted; "go right into it — key of G."

"Hey, Johnny" — it was Eddy Moore again — "I got a solo worked up on this number —"

"Yeah, I know," I said, "take the whole third chorus."

I knew that drum solo. I had heard Eddy do it often when he was working in a dive in the Village. He used practically nothing but a press roll and rim shots in it. In case you don't know what a rim shot is, it's when the drummer holds his left stick with one end resting on the skin of the snare drum, and the other end on the rim, and then whacks that left stick with the right stick. It makes a very loud, resonant crack. I hope that's clear. Anyway, Eddy used a lot of rim shots in this particular solo, and in one place toward the end he used five in succession in a series of offbeats.

I was thinking all this during the first chorus, and wondering if Eddy would play it the same as he used to, when I looked around to nod to Dipsy Dorgan to take the second chorus. But Dipsy wasn't on the stand. In fact, Dipsy wasn't anywhere in sight. I pointed to the trombone player to take the chorus, instead, and then settled down to some plain, old-fashioned worrying. Where had that Dorgan gone without saying a word?

The trombone solo ended and was I glad! The man who played it was by no means Miff Mole, nor yet Tom Dorsey. I sighed with relief and settled down to enjoy Eddy Moore's drum solo. It was wonderful. I had to grin from sheer delight as I sat there playing stop-time chords. Eddy was grand. He hadn't changed one eighth note in that little one-chorus arrangement. The customers liked it, too, and crowded around the stand. When he came to the five offbeats, he laid into those rim shots like crazy. The kids screamed hysterically, and I put up one finger, which means take another chorus, and waved the band out altogether, and let Eddy go out on his own.

I'm telling you that he played five choruses, any one of which would have done credit to Cozy Cole at the Onyx Club. The kids out on the floor were going nuts. Finally I signaled the band for a last ride chorus and swung around to the keyboard to give with that high treble smash.

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To my great delight, a trumpet came in about the second bar and lifted that number way up to a terrific finish. Dipsy was back on the stand.

The kids were whistling and clapping and stamping their feet, but I knew the boys needed a rest after that, so I snapped my fingers and the alto sax player went "Yoo-hoo" on his instrument, which everybody knows means the end of the set. The dancers all began to melt off the floor, and I twisted around on the bench to give my trumpet player a little going over. He was coming toward me, picking his way over the instruments across the bandstand. I remember noticing how white and kind of drawn his face was.

"Johnny," he began. "I'm sorry as hell, but I was ready to drop after Dipsy Doodle, and I ran off the stand quick to get that Scotch you said I could have. It took me a little longer than I thought, but I finally found it and had my snort and ran right back."

He looked so worried and earnest I couldn't stay sore at him, so I said, "Okay. But stick on the stand from now on. It was a good thing I had Eddy Moore around with his Krupa special on that number."

I got up and stretched. "That boy was really swinging out," I said.

"Yeah," said Dipsy, "and it's a funny thing. I want to tell you —"

"You remember those five offbeats in the original solo?" I interrupted — I was enjoying the memory — "you must have heard those rim shots clear inside the house. Especially the last two. Wonder he didn't wreck his drum." I started to step off the stand.

"That's just what I wanted to talk to you about," said Dipsy, and all of a sudden he sounded a little hysterical. "I heard those rim shots, but where I was those last two offbeats weren't rim shots. They were pistol shots."

I remember I just sort of blinked at Dipsy and said, "Pistol shots?"

"Johnny," he said, "I'm standing in this pantry, see? And I'm tossing off this slug and getting a load of Eddy's solo, and I heard the rim shots, but the two were much closer and much louder than the others. They went 'bang, bang' just like a pistol."

He poured it all out like a kid. I would have laughed at him if he hadn't looked so scared. And then I began to have an uneasy little feeling that maybe he had heard something. Right then the dame screamed.

It was an awful scream, and it seemed to go on forever and grow louder. Everybody around was silent while this scream mounted like one of Dipsy Dorgan's crescendos. Finally the dame came bursting out of the house, still screaming. It was Constance Canning.

"Oh! It's terrible!" she sobbed. "She's dead! Candace Armour! She's shot herself!"

The back of my neck prickled. You know how it is when you suddenly realize too late that somebody you think has been babbling has really been making sense. Rim shots. Pistol shots. Dipsy's face was gray.

"Go back to the stand and stay

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there!" I yelled, over the hubbub. "I've got a phone call to make."

I went through the kitchen and the pantry thumbing my address book. I found a phone in the back hall and dialed that special number. Thank God the Bradley estate was just inside New York City. I didn't know any Nassau County police, and I did know Detective Lieutenant Matt Bowen of the New York headquarters homicide squad. I prayed he would be home tonight. He was, and said he would be over in twenty minutes.

I felt relieved. Candace was a suicide, and it was much better to have the cops around to okay the fact. Sooner or later, among a hundred people at a party, somebody would holler murder, and then who were you going to suspect?

I ran back and joined the crowd. By this time it had clustered around outside a ground-floor window that faced away from the dance floor. As I pushed my way through the jam, I could see Candace. The window was open and she was slumped across the sill, as if she had been leaning 'way out, and then suddenly gone to sleep. On a bare spot in the flower bed, a small revolver was lying, just as it must have slipped out of her fingers, after she gave herself the one-two.

The crowd was still too stunned and shocked to do much of anything but stand there and gawk. Over on one side, little Connie Canning was sobbing in Anton Gordon's arms. I looked around for Beth or Edgar, and saw Beth coming through the crowd toward me. She was dabbing at her face with a little handkerchief, and at her heels was that Frentrup kid, eyes really blazing now. I got hold of Beth's hand and squeezed it — I've known Beth a long time — and said, "Take it easy, kid."

So what does this Frentrup bird do but knock my hand down and say in a loud clear voice, "Take your hands off her, musician. You are hired to furnish music, not to fondle our women!"

Before I could think of a comeback to that, he poured another one on me. "And, incidentally," he said, and he threw his chin out like a contortionist, "where was that trumpeter of yours, Dorgan, a few minutes before Miss Canning found the body?"

I felt it coming. In a case like this, there is always someone who will holler murder.

"Listen, kid," I said, "do you think Dipsy Dorgan was with Candace urging her to commit suicide?"

"I don't think Candace Armour committed suicide," he retorted. "She was shot in the right temple. And she was left-handed!"

I looked around the crowd, feeling sick to my stomach. Nobody denied that Candace was a lefty. It looked as if the boy Sherlock had something.

"So what does that prove?" I demanded. "It doesn't take any strength to squeeze a trigger."

That was a mistake. Frentrup was on me like a flash.

"You're trying to stall!" he yelled. "Where is that trumpeter, Dorgan?"

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"I'm right here," said Dipsy, at my elbow, and his face was the color of dirty white oilcloth.

"There he is!" screamed Frentrup to the crowd. "Dipsy Dorgan! An Irish musician who has been caught several times playing around with our sisters and sweethearts. And tonight, for one reason or another, he murdered one of our women!"

"Just a minute," I said, taking my hundred and sixty-seven pounds of seal blubber forward, "you can't say a thing like that!"

"Oh, can't I?" said Norval Frentrup, and spread his legs wide apart. "Then ask your Mr. Dorgan where he was during the eight or ten minutes when he wasn't on the bandstand a little while ago. It was during those eight or ten minutes that Candace Armour died."

He leaned back on his hips, dramatically, and shoved a hand in his pocket. The crowd murmured indistinctly, and it occurred to me that this kid was working awfully hard to prove, for one thing, that a murder had been committed and, for another, that Dipsy Dorgan had committed it. I thought, methinks he is hollering too loud, as Shakespeare said. Could Norval Frentrup have had anything to do with the death of Miss Candace Armour?

Then Dipsy said, "Has anyone notified the police?"

"Yes," I said quickly, "I did. They ought to be here any time now."

"You see?" It was Frentrup again, addressing the crowd. "They want the police. I say where was Dorgan during those ten minutes?"

"I'll tell that to the police when they come," cried Dipsy.

"You see!" — Frentrup's voice rose to a shriek — "the musician has no adequate answer. I swear before all of you that he killed Candace Armour, and I for one, propose to avenge her.

In the dead silence he leaned forward and glared at Dipsy. Then without any warning he snatches a gun out of his pocket and aims it at poor Dipsy. I gave a little squeak and started to shut my eyes, when out of nowhere come two uniformed cops and grab the boy by the arms.

Five minutes later I spotted Detective-Lieutenant Matt Bowen. He was just coming from a quick look at the corpse. My knees were still weak as I took him and Dipsy over to the bandstand and sat us all down.

"Now," Matt began, "what has this Frentrup child got against Dorgan? What with blowing off that Dorgan was missing during the crucial minutes, he's got everybody saying that Dorgan fired the shots."

"I don't know, Matt," I answered. "I simply don't know. Either he's a natural-born whacky, or he killed her himself. Incidentally," I added, "what about that left-hand, right-hand stuff? Do you think she might have killed herself with the gun in the wrong hand?"

"She couldn't have killed herself with either hand," said Matt dryly. "There were no powder burns, and

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there's nothing around her that indicates she used anything to shoot through, like a piece of cloth, or anything like that. No, Johnny, I'm afraid we got a murder on our hands."

He turned to Dipsy and said briskly, "Now, let's get you straightened out. You were in the house having a drink of Scotch when the girl died. Where were you exactly?"

"I was in the pantry, between the kitchen and the dining room."

"I see. Who gave you the Scotch?"

"Nobody gave it to me. I found it myself."

"Good for you. Who did you see on your way in and out?"

"That's just it," said Dipsy miserably, "I didn't see anybody."

Matt stroked his blue Irish chin thoughtfully for a moment, then he said, "What you need is an alibi, and as far as I can see, you haven't got one. Did you shoot the girl, Dorgan?"

"So help me, I didn't, Lieutenant," he groaned. "I was a beat-up trumpet player and I went in there looking for a drink. I never messed around with Candace Armour in my life and I never killed her."

The detective flashed one glance at Dipsy, and looked over at me.

"What's your theory, Johnny," he said, "who do you think did it?"

"How would I know, Matt?" I sighed. "The dame was falling-down drunk in front of ninety-nine people, any one of whom could've shot her. I thought she was on the dance floor all the time, but Dorgan says he heard what might have been shots when he was inside the house ——"

"Yeah?" said Matt. "Tell me about the shots, Dorgan." So Dipsy told him what he told me.

"Hey, here's something," I said. "Last I saw of her she was dancing with a guy named Anton Gordon."

"Now you're getting somewhere," Matt said. "I'll have Mr. Gordon paged."

"You don't need to, Officer, I'm right here." It was Anton, carrying a highball. "I came to see if I could help Dorgan in any way, Johnny," he continued. "Musicians ought to stick together."

"Were you the last person to see the deceased alive?" snapped Matt.

"I don't know about that," Anton replied, very direct. "I certainly was the last man to dance with her. She had what you might call a skinful, so I took her to the door of the ladies' powder room. I thought if she got rid of some of it, she'd feel better."

"Did you wait for her at the door?"

"No. I didn't expect her out right away so I came back to the dance floor."

"About when did all this happen?"

"That's hard to say. I didn't notice the time, but I should say the music stopped about five minutes after I came out, and then my fiancée, Miss Canning, went into the powder room and discovered the tragedy."

"Did you see anybody in the powder room, or in the hallways as you went in and out?"

"There was nobody in the powder

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room, as far as I could tell from the door, and if anyone was in the hall, I didn't notice him. But then I had quite a handful —"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Matt. "Did you see Dorgan go in or out of the house?"

Anton hesitated a fraction of a second while my heart did a nip-up.

"No, I didn't," he said finally. "You see the kitchen door where Dorgan went is around the corner from where I was."

I think that was the first time I ever liked Anton Gordon. He was a terrible violinist, and was generally kind of a phony, but he certainly helped Dipsy's position with that last remark.

"Well, thanks, Mr. Gordon, for your frank answers," Matt said heartily. "I don't know as they've done me much good, but they give me an idea of what I'm up against."

"Anything I can do to help," said Anton, earnestly, "please call on me."

"I appreciate that," said Matt, genially. "As a matter of fact, I may want to ask you some more questions later, so stick around. Incidentally, how do you figure this case, Mr. Gordon? You got any theories on it?"

"Frankly, I have," said Anton. "In the first place, I don't think Dorgan here did it. But I certainly would be interested in checking young Frentrup's alibi very carefully."

"Yes," I chimed in — I could have kissed Anton. "How about that boy? He was all in favor of naming the murderer and lynching him before the police arrived."

"I know, I know," said Matt, "don't worry, we'll take care of the boy. Right now I want to go in and see the people who own this place."

I stood up with him, feeling much better. Things looked better for Dipsy, thanks to Anton. And I thought Anton came out of the questioning pretty well, too. I confess I had a few suspicions about him at first, but the story he told sounded strictly on the level, and I never saw anybody look less like a murderer.

"You two better come into the house with me," said Matt, meaning me and Anton, "and, also, Johnny I want the names and addresses o all the boys in the band."

"I got them right here," I said, an picked up the little union book, whic lists the entire membership of th musicians' local. I had been using th book that afternoon calling up me to do this very date.

"Good," said Matt, "let's go. An you, Dorgan, if you're smart, you' stay right where you are."

Dipsy ran a hand through his blon hair, and nodded kind of hopelessly we left him and started around t corner of the house. Candace's bo hadn't been moved, but a squad uniformed cops had cleared the crow away from the outside of the windo and some detectives were busy arou the spot with electric torches a flashgun cameras. One of them ca up to Matt with a big cop in tow.

"This is Sergeant Gowan, Lieut ant," says the young dick, "from t

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precinct out here."

"Oh, yes," says Matt. "Sergeant, will you herd all the guests into the house and put 'em in one room."

"The dining room would probably hold them all," I put in.

"All right, the dining room," says Matt. "Hold them there until I can come in and check their names from the guest list. Get the musicians, too. All except a fella named Dorgan. Leave him alone, but post a man out of sight to watch him. If this Dorgan tries to make a break, your man will know what to do."

What did that mean? I wondered. It sounded as if Matt Bowen were setting a trap deliberately for Dipsy. Why, if the kid started to run away, he'd be killed, and that wasn't fair. I looked at Anton, and Anton looked back at me. I didn't know whether to try to protest or not. Anyway, by now, Matt was talking to the younger detective.

"What did you find, Dietrich?" he said.

"Not much," says the dick. "The ground below the window is all stomped over by a million people, so there's nothin' there. Offhand, the prints on the gun check with the girl's."

Anton broke in. "Excuse me, Lieutenant, but I brought this highball out for poor Dorgan, and then forgot to give it to him. Do you mind if I do that right now? I'll join you in the house right away."

"No, go ahead," said Matt, sort of absently, and started talking to Dietrich again. "Sure, sure. Prints were wiped off, and the gun was squeezed into the girl's hand. Find anything else?"

I watched Anton Gordon disappear around the house. Apparently I'd been misjudging that guy for a long time. He was coolly going back to warn Dipsy of the trap. How Matt Bowen ever let him go, I don't know. I was hardly conscious of Dietrich's answer to Matt Bowen's last question.

"Yeah, I did," Dietrich was saying, "a little shred of cloth — black, I think. Caught between the hammer and the firing-pin of the gun."

"What do you make of that?"

"The gun might've been fired through a man's pocket, and the hammer pinched off a piece of the lining when it snapped down."

"I think you got something there," said Matt. "Women's handbags are sometimes lined with black cloth, too. Silk. Is the piece you found silk?"

"I wouldn't know. Maybe."

"Well, I would say that was a nice lead. All we got to do now is search about a hundred people and see have they got any holes in their pockets or handbags."

He heaved a big sigh, and we went on up to the front door. Beth and Edgar were there as if they had been waiting for us. After I introduced Matt, Beth said, "Come into the living room. Mother and Father are in there with Constance Canning who discovered the —" Beth couldn't say the word, but broke off and led us into the living room, with Edgar

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following us.

The elder Bradleys were nice, gray-haired people who were in the middle of a lot of trouble they hadn't started. I felt sorry for them. Ma Bradley was on a big couch stroking Connie's forehead. Connie was stretched out with her eyes closed. Pa Bradley came forward grimly and handed a couple of sheets of paper to Matt. I supposed it was the list of guests. The big detective stood in the middle of the floor, skimming through the columns of names. When he finished, he said in a very kindly tone, "I won't trouble you any more than I can help, Mr. Bradley. About all I can do with this list right now is check the names off in front of the guests and see if anyone is missing. I would like to ask one or two questions of you all here, though. First of all, I'd like to know if there was any bad feeling that might have existed between the deceased and any of the persons who were present at the party."

Beth and Edgar shook their heads.

"You see," Matt continued, "I've got to find someone with a strong enough motive to bring a revolver to a pleasant gathering like —"

He never got a chance to finish because Connie had bounced off the couch and was standing in front of him with her little fists clenched, and sobbing great, awful sobs.

"I had a motive!" she babbled. "I hated Candace Armour! She was trying to take Anton away from me! But I didn't kill her, I didn't kill her!" Her voice trailed off in a wail. Everybody leaped toward her, horrified, but she put her arm over her eyes and stumbled into Mrs. Bradley's arms. Matt nodded at the older woman, and she led Connie out.

After a few seconds when everybody seemed too shocked to say anything, Beth turned those honest eyes of hers on Matt and said, "Officer, that must have sounded terribly incriminating to you, but I know Connie and she couldn't have done it. Not possibly. Why, she wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Yeah, sure, sure," said Matt, "but you realize, of course, that everyone on the premises, bar none, is under suspicion until he is cleared."

Nice, good-natured Edgar Bradley stood up with a very queer expression.

"Here's something I think you ought to know, Lieutenant," he began, in a strained voice. "Nobody brought that gun here at all. It was here all the time. It belongs to me."

You could've really knocked me over with a piccolo. What kind of a murder was this, anyway? Either you didn't have an alibi, like Dipsy, or you were last seen with the murdered person, like Anton Gordon, or you had a motive, like Connie, or finally, you owned the gun, like Edgar.

Edgar was telling Matt some more about the rod. It seems the Bradleys had a kind of den in the rear of the house, which they converted into a powder room for the girls, because it was handy to the dance floor, and had a lavatory adjoining. The desk and the leather furniture were taken out,

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but evidently nobody thought to take out the pair of double-action .22's that were holstered on a cartridge belt that was lying on top of a long bookcase. Edgar had permits for them and used them on a target range. They were always kept unloaded, but it would be easy enough for anyone — the murderer, for instance — to load one of them from the belt. Edgar looked like a ghost, but he went through the whole story.

Just then, the young detective, Dietrich, came in.

"Nothin' on Frentrup," he said. "Says he can prove he never left the dance floor. His revolver's clean."

"Book him anyway, on an assault charge," Matt snapped.

That was some consolation. I watched Anton Gordon enter the room, walk over and sit down beside Matt. I didn't listen to the conversation, because I was trying to figure out how Frentrup could have killed Candace and preserved an alibi.

I tried to reconstruct in my mind the scene on that dance floor when the band started to play *Dipsy Doodle.* I thought if I could remember where everybody was standing, I might get an idea. I did. I beat it out of the room in search of Eddy Moore. He was in the big dining room, where the musicians and the guests were huddled.

"Eddy," I whispered, "who requested *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead,* out there a while back?"

"Oh, my drum solo," said Eddy. "You mean who requested it?" Eddy catches right on.

"Yes," I said. "Do you remember?"

"Sure, I do," he answered. "Let's see now, who was it?"

"I know!" he said, at last, with a big smile. "That guy. I can't think of his name right now. But you know him. Tall fella."

"*What* tall fella?" I said. "Was it Frentrup?"

"Yeh-yeh, Frentrup." Eddy beamed, then he frowned. "No. That ain't right. No, his name wasn't Frentrup. That is, I don't think it was."

"Oh, what's the use!" I snorted, and started back toward the living room. If that dummy could only have remembered who made that request, it might have quite a bearing on this crime. The more I thought about it, the more I began to think that drum solo was no coincidence. I sank down in an easy chair in the living room, and tried to figure another angle. It was at that moment that a gun roared outside.

Matt Bowen whipped toward the door, stopped long enough to say, "All of you stay in this room," and whipped out. He was back in a minute that seemed like a year, and with him were two cops carrying Dipsy.

"Did you kill him?" I screamed. It came over me like a wave, how fond I was of that trumpet player.

"Nah!" said the first cop, kind of disgusted. "He started to lam into the bushes, so I fired in the air to make him halt, and Murphy sapped him."

They dumped him on the couch where he lay still. My hands were shaking so hard I put them in my

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pockets. The crazy fool! Why did he try to run?

Anton Gordon shook his head with a sigh and strolled toward the door.

"Well," he said, "I guess that's the answer. When a murder suspect tries to escape, he looks guilty."

Was Anton being a help! Something stopped me from cursing him out plenty right then, and that something was a little idea that started humming in my brain, quiet but insistent, like a muted trumpet. My right hand in my coat pocket closed over the union book. I pulled it out and started thumbing through it. Anton lit a cigarette and started to drift through the doorway.

"Where are you going, Anton?" I said.

"Just across the hall," he said.

"Wait a second for me, will you?" I said. All the time I was hunting for a name in that little book, a name I knew would be there. But it wasn't. With one eye on the band leader, I looked again. It sure wasn't there. I thought I must be crazy. Then I got the supreme hunch of my life. I flipped over to the back of the book, and looked under "Drums." Sure enough, there was that name.

"Matt!" I bellowed, "I've got your murderer! He's Anton Gordon — trying to sneak out of that doorway!"

"You must be out of your mind, Johnny!" Anton snapped.

"Yeah?" said I, "I'm crazy like a fox. You followed Candace Armour into that room, and you picked up one of those guns off the bookcase, and loaded it, and wrapped it up in something and then let her have it."

The tall band leader looked at me and then at Matt with amazement written all over his face. "But this is preposterous, Lieutenant," he said. "I don't know how Johnny expects to prove any of these wild statements."

Matt didn't take his eyes off Anton, but said to me out of the side of his mouth, "Got any proof, Johnny?"

I almost groaned out loud. That was my trouble. I was acting purely on a hunch. I tried frantically to think of some way to stall. There was a terrific groan from the couch, and Dipsy struggled up to a sitting position.

"Dipsy!" I cried. "For the love of God, why did you try to run away?"

"Because that cheap skunk of a fiddle player told me to," croaked Dipsy as he glared at Anton.

"He said the cops were framing the murder on me, and he gave me the keys to his car."

That stopped Gordon. He didn't have a word to say. But I did.

"Why, you heel!" I yelled. "You thought if you could scare Dipsy into running, the cops would kill him, and the case would be closed, didn't you?"

Anton bit his lip and darted a glance at Matt. "Lieutenant!" he said, "I don't know what these men are talking about. I appeal to you to make them either show some basis for all this insane chatter, or stop it."

Why, the louse! He was going to get away from me yet! I knew as sure as I was standing there that that two-bit violinist had bumped the girl off, but

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could I — Then the whole thing came to me in a flash! The piece of cloth Dietrich found in the revolver. . . .

"Search him, Matt!" I shrieked. "You'll find a black handkerchief on him, with a nick in it where the hammer of the gun caught it!"

Anton hadn't taken two steps before the two patrolmen had him, and Matt Bowen hauled a black silk handkerchief out of his pocket. There was a nick in it, all right. There was also a good-sized hole in it, too, where two bullets had burned through.

Matt stared at the hole and the powder burns in that piece of black silk, and said, softly, "You wrapped this around the gun so you wouldn't leave prints. Why did you kill her?"

"We used to be that way," said Anton, dully, "and she never forgave me when I called it off and got engaged to Connie Canning."

"Did she have something on you?" whispered Matt.

"Yes." Anton sighed drearily. "She's made life hell for me. She found out somehow that I once did a short stretch on a marijuana charge, and after that she kept threatening to expose me if I didn't break the engagement and come back to her. Tonight, she was drunk and indiscreet, and I dragged her off the dance floor and into the powder room because she started to scream 'Jailbird' at the top of her lungs. Then when I got her inside I saw the guns, and I kind of went off my head — I didn't know what I was doing."

"The hell you didn't," I cut in. "Your mind was working so fast that you ran out to the bandstand and requested a number. And then you went back and finished her."

Matt Bowen couldn't keep the puzzled expression off his big, Irish puss. He jerked his thumb toward the hall, and I followed him out.

"Johnny," he said, "Will you tell me how in hell you knew that gigolo would have a black handkerchief?"

"Easy," I said, "violinists often use silk handkerchiefs tucked under their chins to keep the fiddle from chafing their necks. Some of them use black ones, some of them use white ones."

"Gee!" said Matt, "I would never have known that in a million years. Then what was that about him requesting a certain tune to be played?"

"He asked for a number that my drummer did a solo on. He must have known that solo, and figured that a certain place in it would cover the sound of the shots. What he did was aim that gun and *shoot in rhythm!*"

"He must be an awful good musician to be able to do that," said Matt.

"He's a lousy violinist," I snapped. "In fact, he's so bad he couldn't get a union card that way. Look." I pulled out the union book and opened it up at "Drums." There it was. "Anton Gordon, 620 E. 31st St."

"It takes a drummer," I said, "to commit murder on the offbeat."

I felt a tug at my elbow. I looked around into the puss of Eddy Moore.

"Johnny!" says Eddy, as pleased as Punch. "I just thought of that guy's name. It's Anton Gordon."

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BLACK MAX

by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

A DEEP frown of worry vanished from the hawklike face of Detective Sergeant Max Rogers as the door opened to admit his stalwart son. Hatred of others could not exist in the breast of the grizzled chief of the plain-clothes force while he was with his son, and so, as he crossed the room and dropped a hand affectionately on the lad's broad shoulders, the menace of Detective Jim Maggiore was temporarily forgotten.

"I'm proud of you, son," said the sergeant huskily. "They've been a long time taking you out of uniform and off a beat — but it's come at last and it's a big step upward."

The boy grinned. He had an engaging smile which lighted his fine face. There was that difference of eyes between father and son — the boy smiled with his, while his father's possessed an unrelenting, steely glint. But in all his twenty-five years Eddie Rogers had never detected this mercilessness. And it was perhaps because Max had been both father and mother to him; perhaps also because the love of the old man was little short of idolatry.

And that was why, after the boy had gone, the head of the plain-clothes force settled again into a fierce black mood, and his eyes focused venomously on the door which separated his office from that of Jim Maggiore.

On the very day Max Rogers had learned that his son was to be promoted to the detective force he had heard very definitely that the new chief of police intended to retire him and to put Jim Maggiore in his place. Of course he — Max — was old, but he knew that had Maggiore been a less efficient man the change would not be contemplated. So he hated Maggiore with a deep, unreasoning, personal hatred. And Rogers could hate. It was this power to loathe a person beyond all reason, and to prosecute that hatred relentlessly, which had earned for him the sinister sobriquet of Black Max.

The desk sergeant stepped briskly into Rogers' office, saluted and delivered a crisp report. "Trouble at the Madison Hotel, sir. Guest locked in his room raising hell. Clerk thinks he's full of cocaine. He won't come out; says he'll shoot anyone who comes in. Clerk don't want a bunch of harmless bulls — afraid it'll hurt the hotel. He wants some plain-clothes men."

Black Max Rogers dismissed the other with a nod. His eyes gleamed reflectively as he sounded the buzzer. Detective Jim Maggiore answered the summons.

Maggiore was a fine figure of a man; tall and lean and with eager, flashing

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black eyes. He was coatless and collarless and he wore carpet slippers. It was early, and Maggiore had been lounging in his own office. "Yes, sir?" he inquired respectfully, all unconscious of the venom in Max Rogers' heart.

Rogers sketched the situation at the Madison. "Go get him, Maggiore." The face of the plain-clothes man did not change expression. He reached through the open door into his own office and took from a hook the belt upon which his revolver holster was strapped. Quite calmly he slipped the weapon from its sheath. It was a beautiful piece of blue steel mechanism, murderously dainty. Maggiore twirled the chamber, inspected the cartridges and replaced the belt and weapon on the hook. He saluted. "Very good, sir. I'll start right away."

Maggiore vanished through the door. Rogers knew that he had gone to the dormitory for his shoes. But Black Max Rogers was thinking of something else. He was to be retired on pension just because Maggiore was more efficient. With Maggiore out of the way, they'd keep him on the active list — and he wanted to remain chief of the plain-clothes force during these first days of his son's service out of uniform.

He not only hated Maggiore. He was without scruple or mercy. He crossed to the open door and took from the holster Jim Maggiore's revolver. With quick, deft motions he emptied the chambers of cartridges. Then he returned the gun to its holster.

Maggiore reëntered his office. The tall, dark man slipped the belt around his waist, satisfied himself that the revolver hung loose — then walked briskly from the office.

Max Rogers knew Maggiore and realized what would happen. The detective would draw his gun, break down the door at the Madison and enter the room prepared to shoot it out with the drug-crazed man. He would enter the room with an empty revolver. . . .

Max Rogers felt no twinge of regret. His eyes glowed with the steely glint his son did not know. He was, in fact, diabolically satisfied with himself.

Twenty minutes later Detective Sergeant Max Rogers left his office for a consultation with the chief of police. As he neared the door of that office, it opened and Jim Maggiore emerged. Rogers frowned.

"What are you doing here, Maggiore?"

"The chief took me off that Madison thing, Rogers. He has kept me in his office — so I didn't get a chance to report to you."

"Hmph! And all this time that man has been raising the devil at the Madison?"

"No, sir. The chief sent your son down there to get him."

"Eddie?" Black Max shook his head. "The kid won't know how to handle an affair like that. He'll bust right in — and, damn it, Maggiore — he hasn't even got a first-rate gun!"

"Oh, yes, he has, Max." Maggiore spoke in kindly, friendly fashion, "I loaned him mine."

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Add another great detective to G. K. Chesterton's galaxy of Chestertonian sleuths: add Paul Forain — tall, thin, and fair, but French to his fingertips — to that criminological coterie which includes the incomparable Father Brown, the omniscient Horne Fisher, the quidnuncial Mr. Traill, the Jekyllish Dr. Hyde, the poetic Gabriel Gale, and the paradoxical Mr. Pond. And speaking of paradox (and how can one help it even at the mention of the one and only Chesterton?) when is death by the sword not death by the sword? When one man deliberately passes a sword through the heart of another man, is he or is he not a murderer? And when is a second murder not a second murder? Chesterton poses all these paradoxes, and more, and he answers them after his own fashion; for surely in all the history of the detective story no writer invented more paradoxes than did G.K.C., or produced out of his seemingly inexhaustible 'tec top hat more brilliant rabbits of ratiocination.

THE FIVE OF SWORDS

by G. K. CHESTERTON

IT WAS doubtless a strange coincidence that the two friends, the Frenchman and the Englishman, should have argued about that particular subject on that particular morning. The coincidence may perhaps appear less incredible to a philosophic mind, if I add that they had argued about that subject every morning through the whole month of the walking tour that they took in the country south of Fontainebleau. Indeed, it was this repetition and variety of aspect that gave the more logical and patient mind of the Frenchman the occasion of his final criticism.

"My friend," he said, "you have told me many times that you can make no sense of the French duel. Permit me the observation that I can make no sense of the English criticism of the French duel. When we discussed it yesterday, for instance, you twitted me with the affair of old Le Mouton with that journalist who calls himself Vallon. Because the poor old Senator got off with a scratch on the wrist, you called it a farce."

"And you can't deny it was a farce," replied the other stolidly.

"But now," proceeded his friend, "because we happen to pass the Château d'Orage, you dig up the corpse of the old count who was killed there, God knows when, by a vagabond Austrian soldier of fortune, and tell me with a burst of British righteousness that it was a hideous tragedy."

"Well, and you can't deny it was a tragedy," repeated the Englishman. "They say the poor young countess

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couldn't live in the shadow of it, and has sold the château and gone to Paris."

"Paris has its religious consolations," said the Frenchman, smiling somewhat austerely. "But I think you are unreasonable. A thing cannot be bad because it is too dangerous and too safe. If the duel is bloodless you call our poor French swordsman a fool. If it end in bloodshed, what do you call him?"

"I call him a bloody fool," replied the Englishman.

The two national figures might have served to show how real is nationality, and how independent it is of race; or at least of the physical types commonly associated with race. For Paul Forain was tall, thin, and fair, but French to the fingertips, to the point of his imperial or the points of his long, narrow shoes, and in nothing more French than in a certain seriousness of curiosity that lifted his brow in a permanent furrow; you could see him thinking. And Harry Monk was short, sturdy, and dark, and yet exuberantly English — English in his gray tweeds and in his short brown mustache; and in nothing so English as in a complete absence of curiosity, so far as was consistent with courtesy. He carried the humor, and especially the good humor, of the English social compromise with him like a costume; just as one might fancy his gray tweeds carried the gray English weather with him everywhere through those sunny lands. They were both young, and both professors at a famous French college — the one of jurisprudence, the other of English; but the former, Forain, had specialized so much in certain aspects of criminal law that he was often consulted on particular criminal problems. It was certain views of his about murder and manslaughter that had led to the recurrent disagreement about the duel. They commonly took their holidays together, and had just breakfasted at the Inn of the Seven Stars half a mile along the road behind them.

Dawn had broken over the opposite side of the valley and shone full on the side on which their road ran. The ground fell towards the river in a series of tablelands like a terraced garden, and on the one just above them were the neglected grounds and sombre façade of the old château, flanked to left and right by an equally sombre façade of firs and pines, deployed interminably like the lost lances of an army long fallen into dust. The first shafts of the sun, still tinged with red, gleamed on a row of glass frames for cucumbers or some such vegetables, suggesting that the place was at least lately inhabited, and warmed the dark diamonded casements of the house itself, here and there turning a diamond into a ruby. But the garden was overgrown with clumps of wood almost as accidental as giant mosses, and somewhere in its melancholy maze, they knew, the sinister Colonel Tarnow, an Austrian soldier, since not unsuspected of being an Austrian spy, had thrust his blade into the throat of Maurice d'Orage,

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the last lord of that place. The path descended, and the view over the hedge was soon shut out by a great garden wall so loaded with ivies and ancient vines and creepers that it looked itself more like a hedge than a wall.

"I know you've been out yourself, and I know you're far from being a brute yourself," conceded Monk, continuing the conversation. "For my own part, however much I hated a man, I don't fancy I should ever want to kill him."

"I don't know that I did want to kill him," answered the other. "It would be truer to say I wanted him to kill me. You see, I wanted him to be *able* to kill me. That is what is not understood. To show how much I would stake on my side of the quarrel — hallo! What on earth is this?"

On the ivied wall above had appeared a figure, almost black against the morning sky, so that they could see nothing of its face, but only its one frenzied gesture. The next moment it had leaped from the wall and stood in their path, with hands spread out as if for succor.

"Are you doctors, either of you?" cried the unknown. "Anyhow, you must come and help — a man's been killed."

They could see now that the figure was that of a slim young man whose dark hair and dark clothes showed the abrupt disorder only seen in what is commonly orderly. One curl of his burnished black hair had been plucked across his eye by an intercepting branch, and he wore pale yellow gloves, one of which was burst across the knuckles.

"A man killed?" repeated Monk. "How was he killed?"

The yellow-gloved hand made a despairing movement.

"Oh, the wretched old tale!" he cried. "Too much wine, too many words, and the end next morning. But God knows we never meant it to go so far as this!"

With one of the lightning movements that lay hidden behind his rather dry dignity, Forain had already scaled the low wall and was standing on it, and his English friend followed with equal activity and more unconcern. As soon as they stood there they saw on the lawn below the sight that explained everything, and made so wild and yet apt a commentary on their own controversy.

The group on the lawn included three other men in black frock coats and top hats, excluding the messenger of misfortune, whose own silk hat lay rolled at random by the wall over which he had leaped. He seemed to have leaped it, by the way, with an impetuosity that spoke of a swift reaction of horror or repentance, for Forain noticed, only a yard or two along the garden wall, a garden door, which, though doubtless disused, rustily barred and blotched with lichen, would have been the natural exit of a more normal moment. But the eye was very reasonably riveted on the two figures, clad only in white shirts and trousers, round whom the

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rest revolved, and who must have crossed swords a moment before. One of these stood with the rapier still poised in his hand, a mere streak of white, which a keen eye might have seen to end in a spot of red. The other white-shirted figure lay like a white rag on the green turf, and a sword of the same pattern, a somewhat antiquated one, lay gleaming in the grass where it had fallen from his hand. One of his black-coated seconds was bending over him, and as the strangers approached lifted a livid face, a face with spectacles and a black triangular beard.

"It's too late," he said. "He's gone."

The man still holding the sword cast it down with a wordless sound more shocking than a curse. He was a tall, elegant man, with an air of fashion even in his dueling undress; his face, with a rather fine aquiline profile, looked whiter against red hair and a red pointed beard. The man beside him put a hand upon his shoulder and seemed to push him a little, perhaps urging him to fly. This witness, in the French phrase, was a tall, portly man with a long black beard cut as if in the square pattern of his long black frock-coat, and having, somewhat incongruously, a monocle screwed into one eye. The last of the group, the second of the slayer's formal backers, stood motionless and somewhat apart from the rest — a big man, much younger than his comrades, and with a classical face like a statue's and almost as impassive as a statue's. By a movement common to the whole tragic company, he had removed his top hat at the final announcement, as if at a funeral, and the effect gave to English eyes a slight shock; for the young man's hair was cropped so close and so colorless that he might almost have been bald. The fashion was common enough in France, yet it seemed incongruous to the man's youth and good looks. It was as if Apollo were shaved as an Eastern hermit.

"Gentlemen," said Forain at last, "since you have brought me into this terrible business, I must be plain. I am in no position to be pharisaic. I have all but killed a man myself, and I know that the riposte can be almost past control. I am not," he added, with a faint touch of acidity, "a humanitarian, who would have three men butchered with the axe of the guillotine because one has fallen by the sword. I am not an official, but I have some official influence; and I have, if I may say so, a reputation to lose. You must at least convince me that this affair was clean and inevitable like my own, otherwise I must go back to my friend the innkeeper of the Seven Stars, who will put me in communication with another friend of mine, the chief of police."

And without further apology, he walked across the lawn and looked down at the fallen figure, a figure peculiarly pathetic because plainly younger than any of the survivors, even his second who had run for help. There was no hair on the pale face; the hair on the head was very fair and brushed in a way which Monk, with

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a new shock of sympathy, recognized as English. There was no doubt of the death; a brief examination showed that the sword had been sent straight through the heart.

The big man with the big black beard broke the silence in reply:

"I will thank you, sir, for your candor, since I am, in some melancholy sense, your host on this occasion. I am Baron Bruno, owner of this house and grounds, and it was here at my table that the mortal insult was given. I owe it to my unfortunate friend Le Caron" — and he made a gesture of introduction towards the red-bearded swordsman, "to say it was a mortal insult, and followed by a direct challenge. It was a charge of cheating at cards, and it was clinched by one of cowardice. I mean no harshness to the dead, but something is due to the living."

Monk turned to the dead man's seconds. "Do you support this?" he demanded.

"I suppose it's all right," said the young man with the yellow gloves. "There were faults on both sides."

Then he added abruptly: "My name is Waldo Lorraine, and I'm ashamed to say I am the fool who brought my poor friend here to play. He was an Englishman, Hubert Crane, whom I met in Paris, and meant, heaven knows, only to give a good time! And the only service I've done him is to be his second in this bloody ending. Dr. Vandam here, being also a stranger in the house, kindly acted as my colleague. The duel was regular enough, I must fairly say, but the quarrel was ——" He paused, a shadow of shame darkening his dark face. "I have to confess I was no judge of it, and have no memory but a sort of nightmare. In plain words, I had drunk too much to know or care."

Dr. Vandam, the pale man in the spectacles, shook his head mournfully.

"I can't help you," he said. "I was at the Seven Stars, and only came in time to arrange for the fight."

"My own fellow-witness, M. Valence," observed the baron, indicating the man with the cropped hair, "will ratify my version of the dispute."

"Had he any papers?" asked Forain after a pause. "May I examine the body?"

There was no opposition, and after searching the dead man and his waistcoat and coat that lay on the lawn, the investigator at last found a single letter, short but confirmatory, so far as it went, of the story told him. It was signed "Abraham Crane," and was plainly from the dead man's father in Huddersfield; indeed, Monk was able to recognize the name as that of a noted manufacturing magnate in the north. It merely concerned business on which the young man had been sent to Paris, apparently to confirm some contract with the Paris branch of the firm of Miller, Moss & Hartman; but the rather sharp adjuration to avoid the vanities of the French capital suggested that perhaps the father had some hint of the dissipations that had brought the son to his death. One thing only in this very

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commonplace letter puzzled the inquirer not a little. It ended by saying that the writer might himself be coming to France to hear the upshot of the Miller, Moss & Hartman affair, and that if so he would put up at the Seven Stars and call for his son at the Château d'Orage. It seemed odd that the son should have given the address of the very place where he was living the riotous life his father so strongly condemned. The only other object in the pockets besides the common necessaries was an old locket enclosing the faded portrait of a dark lady.

Forain stood frowning a moment, the paper twisted in his fingers; then he said abruptly: "May I go up to your house, Monsieur le Baron?"

The Baron bowed silently; they left the dead man's seconds to mount guard over his body, and the rest mounted slowly up the slope. They went the slower for two reasons — first, because the steep and straggling path was made more irregular by straggling roots of pine like the tails of dying dragons, and slippery with green slime that might have been their own green and unnatural gore; and second, because Forain stopped every now and then to take what seemed needless note of certain details of the general decay. Either the Baron had not long been in possession of the place, or he cared very little for appearances.

What had once been a garden was eaten by giant weeds, and when they passed the cucumber frames on the slope Forain saw they were empty and the glass of one of them had a careless crack, like a star in the ice. Forain stood staring at the hole for nearly a minute.

Entering the house by the long French windows, they came first on a round outer room with a round card-table. It might by the shape have been a turret-room, but seemed somehow as light and sunny as a summerhouse, being white and gold in the ornate eighteenth-century style. But it was as faded as it was florid, and the white had grown yellow and the gold, brown. At the moment this decay was but the background of the silent yet speaking drama of a more recent disorder. Cards were scattered across the floor and table, as if flung or struck flying from a hand that held them; champagne bottles stood or lay at random everywhere, half of them broken, nearly all of them empty; a chair was overturned. It was easy to believe all that Lorraine had said of the orgy that now seemed to him a nightmare.

"Not an edifying scene," said the Baron, with a sigh, "and yet I suppose it has a moral."

"It may appear singular," replied Forain, "but in my own moral problem it is even reassuring. Given the death, I am even glad of the drink."

As he spoke he stooped swiftly and picked up a handful of cards from the carpet.

"The five of spades," he said to Monk musingly in English, "the five of swords, as the old Spaniards would say, I suppose. You know 'spade' is

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'espada,' a sword? The four of swords — spades, I mean. The three of spades. The — have you a telephone?"

"Yes — in another room, round by the other door of the house," answered the Baron, rather taken aback.

"I'll use it, if I may," said Forain, and stepped swiftly out of the card-room. He strode across a larger and darker *salon*, which for some reason had remained in a sterner and more antiquated style of decoration. There were antlers above him; a glimmer of armor showed on the gloom of oak and tapestry, and he saw one thing that arrested his eye as he strode towards the farther door. A trophy of two swords, crossed, was on one side of the fireplace, and on the corresponding place opposite, the empty hooks of another. He understood why the two rapiers had seemed to be antiquated. Under the ominous empty hooks stood an ebony cabinet carved with cherubs as grotesque as goblins.

Forain felt as if the black cherubim were peering at him with a curiosity quite unangelic. He gazed a moment at the drawers of the cabinet, and passed on.

He shut the door behind him, and they heard another door close in a more distant part of the building, away towards the road that ran on the remoter side of the house. There was a silence; they could hear neither the bell nor the talk at the telephone.

Baron Bruno had dropped the glass from his eye, and was plucking a little nervously at his long dark beard.

"I suppose, sir," he said, addressing Monk, "we can count on your friend's feeling of honor?"

"I am certain of his honor," said the Englishman, with the faintest accent on the possessive pronoun.

The surviving duelist, Le Caron, spoke for the first time, and roughly.

"Let the man telephone," he said. "No French jury would call this miserable thing murder. It was almost an accident."

"One to be avoided, I think," said Monk coldly.

Forain had reappeared, and his brow was cleared of its wrinkle of reflection. "Baron," he said, "I have resolved my little problem. I will treat this tragedy as a private misfortune on one condition — that you all meet me and give me an account that satisfies me within this week, and in Paris. Say outside the Café Roncesvaux on Thursday night. Does that suit you? Is that understood? Very well, let us return to the garden."

When they went out again through the French windows, the sun was already high in heaven, and every detail of the slope and lawn below glittered with a new clarity. As they turned the corner of a clump of trees and came out above the dueling ground, Forain stopped dead and put on the Baron's arm a hand that caught like a hook.

"My God!" he said. "This will never do. You must get away at once."

"What?" cried the other.

"It's been quick work," said the investigator. "The father's here already."

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They followed his glance down to the garden by the wall, and the first thing they saw was that the rusty old garden door was standing open, letting in the white light of the road. Then they realized that a few yards within it was a tall, lean, gray-bearded man, clad completely in black and looking like some Puritanic minister. He was standing on the turf and looking down at the dead. A girl in gray, with a black hat, was kneeling by the body, and the two seconds, as by an instinct of decency, had withdrawn to some distance and stood gazing gloomily at the ground. In the clear sunlight the whole group looked like a lighted scene on a green stage.

"Go back at once — all three of you," said Forain almost fiercely. "Get away by the other door. You must not meet *him*, at least."

The Baron, after an instant's hesitation, seemed to assent, and Le Caron had already turned away. The slayer and his two seconds moved towards the house and vanished into it once more, the tall young man with the shaven head going last with a leisure that made even his long legs look cynical. He was the only one of them who scarcely seemed affected at all.

"Mr. Crane, I think," said Forain to the bereaved father. "I fear you know all that we can tell you."

The gray-bearded man nodded; there was a certain frost-bitten fierceness about his face and something wild in the eye contrasting with the control in the features, something that seemed natural enough at such a time, but which they found afterwards to be more normal to him even in ordinary times.

"Sir," he said, "I have seen the end of cards and wine and the Lord's judgments for everything I feared." Then he added, with an incongruous simplicity somehow rather tragic than comic: "And fencing, sir. I was always against all that French fad of getting prizes for fencing. Football is bad enough, with betting and every sort of brutality, but it doesn't lead to this. You are English, I think?" he said abruptly to Monk. "Have you anything to say of this abominable murder?"

"I say it is an abominable murder," said Monk firmly. "I was saying so to my friend hardly half an hour ago."

"Ah, and you?" cried the old man, looking suspiciously at Forain. "Were you defending duels, perhaps?"

"Sir," replied Forain gently, "it is no time for defending anything. If your son had fallen from a horse, I would not defend horses; you should say your worst of them. If he had been drowned in a boat, I would join you in wishing every boat at the bottom of the sea."

The girl was looking at Forain with an innocent intensity of gaze which was curious and painful, but the father turned impatiently away, saying to Monk: "As you are English at least, I should like to consult you." And he drew the Englishman aside.

But the daughter still looked across at Forain without speech or motion, and he looked back at her with a

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rather indescribable interest. She was fair, like her brother, with yellow hair and a white face, but her features were irregular with that fairy luck that falls right once in fifty times, and then is more beautiful than beauty. Her eyes seemed as colorless as water, and yet as bright as diamonds, and when he met them the Frenchman realized, with a mounting and unmanageable emotion, that he was facing something far more positive than the laxity of the son or the limitations of the father.

"May I ask you, sir," she said steadily, "who were those three men with you just now? Were they the men who murdered him?"

"Mademoiselle," he said, feeling somehow that all disguises had dropped, "you use a harsh word, and heaven knows it is natural. But I must not stand before you on false pretenses. I myself have held such a weapon and nearly done such a murder."

"I don't think you look like a murderer," she said calmly. "But they did. That man with the red beard, he was like a wolf — a well-dressed wolf, which is the worst part of it. And that big, pompous man — what could he be but horrible, with his big black beard and a glass in one eye?"

"Surely," said Forain respectfully, "it is not wicked to be well-dressed, and a man might be more sinned against than sinning and still have a beard and an eyeglass."

"Not all that big beard and that one little eyeglass," she replied positively. "Oh, I only saw them in the distance, but I know quite well I'm right."

"I know you must think any duelist is a criminal and ought to be punished," said Forain rather huskily. "Only, having been one myself ——"

"I don't," she said. "I think those duelists ought to be punished. And just to prove what I mean and don't mean" — and her pale face was changed with a puzzling and yet dazzling smile — "I want you to punish them."

There was a strange silence, and she added quietly:

"You have seen something yourself. You have some guess, I am sure, about how they came to fight, and what was really behind it all. You know there is really something wrong, much more wrong than the quarrel about cards."

He bowed to her, and seemed to yield like a man rebuked by an old friend.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I am honored by your confidence. And your commission."

He straightened himself abruptly, and turned to face the father, who had drawn near again in conversation with Monk.

"Mr. Crane," he said gravely, "I must ask you for the moment to trust me. This gentleman, as well as other countrymen of yours to whom I can refer you, will, I think, tell you that I can be trusted. I have already communicated with the authorities, and you may even regard me in a sense as

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their representative. I can answer for the fact that those responsible in this dreadful affair are under observation, and that justice can effect whatever may be found to be just. If you will honor me with an appointment in Paris after Tuesday next, I can tell you more of many things that you ought to know. Meanwhile, I will make any arrangements you desire touching the — formalities of respect for the dead."

The eye of old Crane was still choleric, but he bowed, and Forain and Monk, returning the salutation, retraced their way up the path to the château. As they did so the Frenchman paused again by the cucumber frame and pointed to the broken glass.

"That's the biggest hole in the story so far," he said. "It gapes at me like the mouth of hell."

"That!" exclaimed his friend. "That might have happened any time."

"It happened this morning," said Forain, "or else — anyhow, the broken bits are fresh; nothing has grown round them. And there is the mark of a heel on the soil inside. One of these men stepped straight onto the glass going down to the dueling ground. Why?"

"Oh, well," observed Monk, "that fellow Lorraine said he was blind drunk last night."

"But not this morning," replied Forain. "And though a man blind drunk, even in broad daylight, might conceivably put his foot into a big glass frame right in front of him, I doubt if he could take it out again so neatly. If he were as drunk as that, I think the mantrap would trip and throw him, and there would be more broken glass. This does not look to me like a man who was blind drunk. It is more like a man who was blind."

"Blind!" repeated Monk, with a quite irrational creeping of the flesh. "But none of these men are blind. Is there any other explanation?"

"Yes," replied Forain. "They did it in the dark. And that is the darkest part of the business."

Anyone who had tracked the course of the two friends on the ensuing Thursday evening, when dusk had already kindled around them the many-colored lights of Paris, might have imagined that they had no purpose but the visiting of a variety of cafés. Yet their course, though crooked and erratic, was designed according to the consistent strategy of the amateur detective. Forain went first to see the countess, the still surviving widow of the nobleman who fell fifteen years before in a duel on the same spot. He went in a literal sense to see her, and not to call on her. For he contented himself with sitting outside the café opposite her house and playing with an *apéritif* until she came out to her carriage — a dark-browed lady, with a beauty rather fixed like a picture than still living like a flower: a portrait from a mummy case. Then he merely glanced at the portrait in the old locket he had taken from the dead man's pocket, nodded almost approvingly, and made his way across the

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river to a less aristocratic and more commercial part of the town. Passing rapidly along a solid street of banks and public buildings, he reached a large hotel built on the same ponderous pattern, but having the usual litter of little tables on the pavement outside. They were intercepted with ornamental shrubs and covered with an awning striped with white and purple, and at a table at the extreme corner, against the last green afterglow of evening, he saw the black bulk of Baron Bruno sitting between his two friends. The awning that shaded them just cut off the upper part of his tall black hat, and Monk had the fancy that he resembled some black Babylonian caryatid supporting the whole building; perhaps there was something Assyrian about his large square beard. The Englishman felt a subconscious temptation to share his countrywoman's prejudice, but it was evident that Forain did not share it. For he sat down with the three men, and began to exhibit a very unexpected camaraderie and even conviviality. He ordered wine and pressed it upon them, passing afterwards into animated conversation, and it was not until about half an hour afterwards that our imaginary spectator, hovering on his trail, would have seen him start up with a slight return to stiffness, salute the company, and resume his singular journey.

His zigzag course through the lighted city carried him first to a public telephone and then to a public office, which Monk was able to identify as the place where the dead body was awaiting medical examination. From this place he came out looking very grim, like one who has faced an ugly fact, but he said nothing and pursued his course to the police headquarters, where he was closeted for some time with the authorities. Then he crossed the river once more, walking swiftly and still in silence, and in a quiet corner of Paris struck the worn white gateway of a building that had once been a hotel in the ancient and aristocratic sense, and was now a hotel in a more commercial but particularly quiet fashion. Passing through the porch and passages, he came out on a garden so secluded that the very sunset sky seemed a private awning of gold and green like the awning of purple and silver under which the sombre Baron had sat. A few guests in evening dress were scattered at tables under the trees, but Forain went swiftly past them to one table near a flight of garden steps, at which he could see a girl in gray with golden hair. It was Margaret Crane; she looked up as he approached, but she only said, as if breathlessly: "Do you know any more about the murder?"

Before he could reply her father had appeared at the top of the steps, and Forain felt vaguely that while the girl's gray dress seemed to harmonize with everything, the rigid and rusty black of the old man's clothes remained like the protest of a Puritan in a garden of Cavaliers.

"The murder," he repeated in a loud and harsh voice, heard every-

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where. "That's what we want to know about. This murder, sir!"

"Mr. Crane," said Forain, "I hope you know how I feel your position, but it is only fair to warn you that in these criminal matters one must speak carefully. If it comes to a trial, your case will be none the better if you have abused these men at random, even in private. And I am bound to say, not only that the duel as a duel seems to have been regular, but that the duelists seem to be men of marked regularity."

"What do you mean?" demanded the old man.

"I will be frank with you and own I have seen them since," said Forain. "Nay, I have passed a sort of festive evening with them — or what I meant to be a festive evening. But I am forced to say they are as little festive as your own conscience could desire. Indeed, they seem to have business habits very much like your own. Frankly, I tried to make them drink and to draw them into a game of cards, but the Baron and his friends coldly declined, said they had appointments, and we parted after black coffee and a brief and rather curious conversation."

"I hate them the more for that," said the girl.

"You are quick, Mademoiselle," observed Forain, with a growing admiration. "I also took the matter in that spirit, if only for experiment. I said bluntly to our baronial friend: 'So long as I thought you were a drinking and a dicing company, I took this for a drunken accident. But let me tell you it does not look well when elderly men, themselves sober, themselves indifferent to play, get a mere boy among them and play cards with him. You know what is thought of that; it is thought that the old man takes a hand — well, rather too like an old hand. And it is worse when he silences his opponent by fencing like an old hand also.' "

"And what did they say to that?" asked the girl.

"It is painful to me to repeat it," said Forain, "but it was quite as uncomfortable a surprise to me. Just as I seemed to have cornered them finally, that red-bearded man, Le Caron, whose sword made the mortal thrust, himself broke in like one abandoning disguise, with impatience and passion. 'I respect the dead,' he said, 'but you force me from any reticence. I can only tell you it was not we, the elder men, who dragged the boy into drink; it was he who dragged us. He arrived at the château half drunk already, and insisted on the Baron ordering champagne from the Seven Stars down the road, for we were a temperate party and the cellar was not even stocked. It was he who insisted on play; it was he who taunted us with being afraid to play; it was he who at last added, quite wantonly and in wild falsehood, the intolerable taunt that we cheated at play.' "

"I will not believe it," said Crane, but his daughter remained silent, with her pale and penetrating face turned towards the amateur detective,

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who continued his report of the conversation.

" 'Oh, I don't ask you to take my word,' Le Caron went on. 'Ask Lorraine himself, ask Dr. Vandam himself, who was sent to the inn for the wine, so that he was away when the row occurred. He stopped behind there to settle, and wasn't sorry, I think, to be out of it. He also, like myself, is glad to be *bourgeois* in these matters. Ask the innkeeper himself; he will tell you the wine was bought well on in the evening, after the young man arrived. Ask the people at the railway station; they will tell you when the young man arrived. You can easily test my story.' "

"I can see by your face," said the girl in a low voice, "that you have tested it. And you have found it true."

"You see the heart of things," said Forain.

"I cannot see the hearts of these men," she answered. "But I can see the hollows where their hearts should be."

"You still find them horrible," he said. "Who can blame you?"

"Horrible!" cried the old man. "Didn't they murder my son?"

"I speak only as an adviser," observed the Frenchman. "I know you cannot believe a duelist could be a respectable man. I only say that, as a fact, these seem to be respectable men. I have not only verified their tale, but traced back something of their past. They seem to have been concerned with commercial things, but solidly and on a considerable scale; I am in touch with the police dossiers, and should know of any other such scandals about them. Forgive me; I fear I do think that a duel is sometimes justifiable. I will not horrify you by saying that this one was justifiable; I only warn you that, in French opinion, they may be able to justify it."

"Yes," said the girl. "They grow more horrible as you speak of them. Oh! that is the really horrible man — the man who can always be justified. Honest men leave more holes gaping, like my poor brother, but the wicked are always in armor. Is there anything so blasphemous as the bad man's case when his case is complete, as the lawyers say; when the judge gravely sums up, and the jury agree and the police obey, and everything goes on oiled wheels? Is there anything so oily as the smell of that oil? It is then I feel I cannot wait for the Day of Judgment to crack their whited sepulchres."

"And it is then," said Forain quietly, "that I fight a duel."

The girl started a little. "Then?" she repeated.

"Then," repeated the Frenchman, lifting his head. "You, mademoiselle, have uttered the defense of the good duelist. You have proved the right of the private gentleman to draw a private sword. Yes, it is then that I do this criminal and bloody thing that so much horrifies you and your father. Yes, it is then that I become a murderer. When there is no crack in the

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whitewash and I cannot wait for the wrath of God. And permit me the reminder that you have not yet heard the end of my interview with the men who have left you in mourning."

Crane still stared in frosty suspicion, but the girl, as Forain suggested, had great intuitions. Her face and eyes kindled as she gazed.

"You don't mean ——" she began, and then stopped.

Forain rose to his feet. "Yes," he said. "Being such a bloodthirsty character, I must no longer remain in company so respectable. Yes, mademoiselle, I have challenged the man who killed your brother."

"Challenged!" repeated the bristling Crane. "Challenged — more of this — of this butchery!" and he choked. But the girl had risen also and stretched out her hand like a queen.

"No, father," she said. "This gentleman is our friend, and he caught me out fairly. But I see now that there is more in French wit than we have understood; yes, and more in French dueling."

With a heightened color and a lowered voice, Forain answered: "Mademoiselle, my inspiration is English." And with a rather abrupt bow he strode away, accompanied by Harry Monk, who regarded him with a contained amusement.

"I cannot affect to hope," said Monk airily, "that I myself constitute the English inspiration of your life."

"Nonsense," said the other rather testily, "let us get back to business. As I imagined your views on dueling were so similar to old Crane's that you could not consistently represent me, I've asked his unfortunate son's seconds to act as mine. I believe that young Lorraine will be of great use in helping us to probe this mystery. I have talked to him, and I am convinced of his great ability."

"And you have talked to me for years," said Monk, laughing, "and you are convinced of my great stupidity."

"Of your great sincerity," said Forain. "That is why I do not ask you to help me here."

Monk's scruples, however, did not prevent his being present at the new encounter that had been so rapidly and even irregularly arranged. And his travels with his eccentric friend, which had already begun to remind him of the overturns and recurrences of a nightmare, brought him a few days later back to the old dueling ground of the Château d'Orage. The garden of Baron Bruno had apparently been selected for a second time as a sort of concession to the Baron's party, but it was a rather grim privilege, and they evidently felt it as such. So little disposed were they, indeed, to linger about the place where they had once feasted and fought, that the Baron's motor was waiting in the road to take them back immediately to Paris. Forain had always vaguely felt that the Baron was very tenuously attached to his house and property, and in this case his party seemed to revisit it

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like ghosts. The prejudice of Margaret Crane would have said that a shadow of doom was visibly closing in on them. But it was more reasonable, and consonant with the more quiet and *bourgeois* character to which they seemed entitled, to suppose that they were naturally distressed at returning to the scene of their one reluctant deed of blood. Whatever the reason, the Baron's brown face was heavy and sombre, and Le Caron, when he again found himself standing sword in hand on that fatal grass, was so white that his beard looked scarlet, like false hair or fiery paint. Monk almost fancied that the bright point of the poised rapier was faintly vibrant, as in a hand that shook.

The pine-shadowed park, with its careless and almost colorless decay, seemed a place where centuries might pass unnoticed. The white morning light served only to accentuate the gray details, and Monk caught himself fancying that it was truly the ashen vegetation of primeval eons. This may have been an effect of his nerves, which were not unnaturally strained. After all, this was the third duel in those grounds, and two had ended in death; he could not but wonder if his friend was to be the next victim. Anyhow, it seemed to him that the preliminaries were intolerably lengthy. Le Caron had long and low-voiced consultations with the lowering Baron; and even Forain's own seconds, Lorraine and the doctor, seemed more inclined to wait and whisper than to come to the mortal business. And all this was the more strange because the fight, when it did come at last, seemed to be over in a flash, like a conjuring trick.

The swords had barely touched twice or thrice when Le Caron found himself swordless. His weapon had twitched itself like a live thing out of his hand, and went spinning and sparkling over the garden wall; they could hear the steel tinkle on the stones of the road. Forain had disarmed him with a turn of the wrist.

Forain straightened himself and made a salute with his sword.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am quite satisfied, if you are. After all, it was a slight cause of quarrel, and the honor of both parties is, so far, secure. Also, I understand, you gentlemen are anxious to get back to town."

Monk had long felt that his friend was more and more disposed to let the opposite group off lightly; he had long been speaking of them soberly as sober merchants. But whether or not it was the anti-climax of safety, he had a sense that the figures opposite had shrunk, and were more commonplace and ugly. The eagle nose of Le Caron looked more like a common hook; his fine clothes seemed to sit more uneasily on him, as on a hastily dressed doll; and even the solid and solemn Baron somehow looked more like a large dummy outside a tailor's shop. But the strangest thing of all was that the Baron's other colleague, Valence, of the shaven head, was standing astraddle in the background, wearing a broad though a bitter grin. As the

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Baron and the defeated duelist made their way rather sullenly through the garden door to the car beyond, Forain went up to this last member of the strange group, and (much to Monk's surprise) talked quickly and quietly for several minutes. It was only when Bruno's great voice was heard calling his name that this last figure also turned and left the garden.

"*Exeunt*, brigands!" said Forain, with a cheerful change in his voice, "and now the four detectives will go up and examine the brigands' den."

And he turned and began once again to mount the slope to the château, the rest following in single file. Monk, who was just behind him, remarked abruptly when they were halfway up the ascent:

"So you didn't kill him, after all?"

"I didn't want to kill him," replied his French friend.

"What did you want?"

"I wanted to see whether he could fence," said Forain. "He can't."

Monk eyed in a puzzled manner the tall, straight, gray-clad back of the figure mounting ahead of him, but was silent till Forain spoke again.

"You remember," continued Forain, "that old Crane said his unfortunate son had actually got prizes for fencing. But that carroty-whiskered Mr. Le Caron hardly knows how to hold a foil. Of course, it's very natural; after all, he is but a quiet business man, as I told you, and deals more in gold than steel."

"But, my good man," cried Monk, addressing the back in exasperation, "what the devil does it all mean? Why was Crane killed in the duel?"

"There never was any duel," said Forain, without turning round.

Dr. Vandam behind uttered an abrupt sound as of astonishment, or perhaps enlightenment; but, though it was followed by many questions, Forain said no more till they stood in the long inner room of the château, with the weapons on the wall and the ebony cabinet on which the black cherubs looked blacker than ever. Forain felt more darkly a certain contradiction between their color and shape that was like a blasphemy. Black cherubs were like the Black Mass — they were symbols of some idea that hell is an inverted copy of heaven, like a landscape hanging downwards in a lake.

He shook off his momentary dreams and stooped over the drawers of the cabinet, and when he spoke again it was lightly enough.

"You know the château, Monsieur Lorraine," he said, "and I expect you know the cabinet, and even the drawer. I see it's been opened lately." The drawer, indeed, was not completely closed, and giving it a sudden jerk, he pulled it completely out of the cabinet. Without further words he bore it, with its contents, back into the card-room and put it on the round table; and at his invitation his three colleagues or co-detectives drew up their chairs and sat round it. The drawer seemed to contain the contents of an old curiosity shop, such as Balzac loved to describe — a tumbled

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heap of brown coins, dim jewels and trinkets, of which tales, true and false, are told.

"Well, what about it?" asked Monk. "Do you want to get something out of it?"

"Not exactly," replied the investigator. "I rather fancy I want to put something into it."

He pulled from his pocket the locket with the dark portrait, and poised it thoughtfully in his hand.

"We have now to ask ourselves," went on the detective to his colleagues, "why young Crane was carrying this, which is a portrait of the countess?"

"He went about Paris a good deal," said Dr. Vandam rather grimly.

"If she knew him well," proceeded Forain, "it seems strange she has taken no notice of his sad end."

"Perhaps she knew him a little too well," cried Lorraine, with a little laugh. "Or, perhaps, though it's an ugly thing to say, she was glad to be rid of him. There were uglier stories when her husband, the old count ——"

"You know the château, Monsieur Lorraine?" repeated Forain, looking at him steadily and even sternly. "I think that's where the locket came from." And he tossed it on to the many-colored heap in the drawer.

Lorraine's eyes were literally like black diamonds as he gazed fascinated at the heap; he seemed really too excited to reply. Forain continued his exposition.

"Poor Crane, I fancy, must have found it here. Or else somebody found it here and gave it to him. Or else somebody — by the way, surely that's a real Renascence chain there — Italian and fifteenth century, unless I'm wrong. There are valuable things here, Monsieur Lorraine, and I believe you're a judge of them."

"I know a little about the Renascence," answered Lorraine, and the pale Dr. Vandam flashed a queer look at him through his spectacles.

"There was a ring, too, I suspect," said Forain. "I have put back the locket. Would you, Monsieur Lorraine, kindly put back the ring?"

Lorraine rose, the smile still on his lips; he put two fingers in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a small circlet of wrought gold with a green stone.

The next moment Forain's arm shot across the table trying to catch his wrist; but his motion, though swift as his sword-thrust, was too late. Young Mr. Waldo Lorraine stood with the smile on his lips and the Renascence ring on his finger while one could count five. Then his feet slipped on the smooth floor and he fell dead across the table, with his black ringlets among the rich refuse of the drawer. Almost simultaneously with the shock of his fall, Dr. Vandam had taken one bound, burst out of the French windows and disappeared down the garden like a cat.

"Don't move," said Forain with a steely steadiness. "The police are on the watch. I warned them the other day in Paris when I saw poor Crane's body."

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"But surely," cried his bewildered friend, "it was not only then that you saw the wound on his body."

"I mean the wound on his finger," said Forain.

He stood a minute or two in silence, looking down at the fallen figure across the table with pity and something almost like admiration.

"Strange," he said at last, "that he should die just here, with his head in all that dustbin of curiosities that he was born among and had such a taste for. My God, he was a genius! And he might have filled the world with his fame. Just a mistake or two, breaking a cucumber frame in the dark, and he lies dead in all that dead bricabrac, as if in the pawnshop where he was born."

The next appointment Forain made with his friends was at the office of the *Sûreté*, in a private room. Monk was a little late for the appointment; the party was already assembled round a table, and it gave him a final shock. He was not, indeed, surprised to see Crane and his daughter sitting opposite Forain, and he guessed that the man presiding, with the white beard and the red rosette, was the chief of police himself. But his head turned when he found the fifth place filled with the broad shoulders and ghastly handsome face of Valence, the younger second of Le Caron.

Old Crane was in the middle of a speech when he entered, and was speaking with his usual smoldering and self-righteous indignation.

"I send my son to execute a deed of partnership in a good business with Miller, Moss and Hartman, one of the first firms in the civilized world, sir, with branches in America and all the colonies, as big as the Bank of England. What happens? No sooner does he set foot in your country than he gets in a dicing, drinking, dueling gang, and is butchered in a barbarous brawl with drawn swords."

"Mr. Crane," said Forain gently, "you will forgive me if I both contradict you and congratulate you. Given so sad a story, I give you the gladdest news a father could hear. You have wronged your son. He did not drink, he did not dice, he did not duel. He obeyed you in every particular. He devoted himself wholly to Messrs. Miller, Moss and Hartman; he died in your service, and he died rather than fail you."

The girl leaned swiftly forward, and she was pale but radiant.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Then who were these men with swords and hateful faces? What were they doing? Who are they?"

"I will tell you," answered the Frenchman calmly. "They are Messrs. Miller, Moss and Hartman, one of the first firms in the civilized world, as big as the Bank of England."

There was a silence of stupefaction on the other side of the table, and it was Forain who went on, but with a change and challenge in his voice.

"Oh, how little you rich masters of the modern world know about the modern world! What do you know

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about Miller, Moss and Hartman, *except* that they have branches all over the world and are as big as the Bank of England? You know they go to the ends of the earth, but where do they come from? Is there any check on businesses changing hands or men changing names? Miller may be twenty years dead, if he was ever alive. Miller may stand for Muller. The backdoors of every business today are open to such newcomers, and do you ever ask from what gutters they come? And then you think your son lost if he goes into a music-hall, and you want to shut up all the taverns to keep him from bad company. Believe me, you had better shut up the banks."

Margaret Crane was still staring with electric eyes. "But what in the name of mercy happened?" she cried.

The investigator turned slightly in his chair and made a movement, as of somewhat sombre introduction, towards Valence, who sat looking at the table with a face like colored stone.

"We have with us," said Forain, "one who knows from within the whole of this strange story. We need not trouble much about his own story. Of the five men who have played this horrible farce, he is certainly the most honest, and therefore the only one who has been in prison. It was for a crime of passion long ago, which turned him from being at worst a Lothario to being at worst an Apache. Hence, these more respectable ruffians had a rope round his neck, and today he is not so much a traitor as a runaway. If on that hideous night he held a candle to the devil, he is no devil-worshipper; at least, he has little worship for these devils."

There was a long silence, and the stony lips of the shaven Apollo curled and moved at last. "Well," he said, "I won't trouble you with much about these men I had to serve. Their real names were not Lorraine, Le Caron, etc., any more than they were Miller, Moss, etc., though they went by the first in society and the second in business. Just now we need not trouble about their real names; I'm sure they never did. They were cosmopolitan moneylenders mostly; I was in their power, and they kept me as a big bully and bodyguard to save them from what they richly deserved at the hands of many ruined men. They would no more have thought of fighting a duel than of going on a crusade. I knew something of the countess, who has nothing to do with the story, except that I got them a short lease of her house. One evening Lorraine, who was the leader and the cleverest rascal in Europe, young as he was, happened to be turning over the drawer of curios, which he had taken out of the black cabinet and put on the round card-table. He found the old Italian ring, and told us it was poisoned; he knew a lot about such toys. Suddenly he made a momentary gesture covering the drawer, like a fence when he hears the police. He recovered his calm; there was no danger, but the gesture told of old times. What had produced it was a

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man who had appeared silently, and was standing outside the French windows, having entered up the garden slope. He was a slim, fair young man, carefully dressed and wearing a silk hat, which he took off as he entered. 'My name is Crane,' he said a little stiffly and nervously, and plucked off his glove to offer his hand, which Lorraine shook with great warmth. The others joined in the greeting, and it gradually became apparent that this was the representative of some firm with whom they were to make an important amalgamation. In the entrance room all was welcome and gaiety, but when young Crane had followed old Bruno into the big inner room, leaving his hat and gloves on the card-table by the curios, I fancy things did not go so smoothly. I did not understand the business fully, but I was watching the three others who did, and I came to the conclusion that Bruno, in their name, was making some proposition to the new junior partner which they regarded as a very handsome proposition for him, but which he did not regard as altogether handsome in other respects. They seemed quite confident at first, but as the talk went on in the inner room Vandam and Le Caron exchanged gloomy glances; and suddenly a full, indignant voice came from within: 'Do you mean, sir, that my father is to suffer?' and then, after an inaudible reply, 'Confidential, sir! The confidence, I imagine, is placed by my father in me. I shall instantly report this astounding proposal. . . . No, sir, I am not to be bribed.' I was watching Lorraine's face, that seemed to have grown old as a yellow parchment, and his eyes glittered like the old stones on the table. He was leaning across it, his mouth close to the ear of Vandam, and he was saying: 'He must not leave the house. Our work all over the world is lost if he leaves this house.' 'But we can't stop him,' whispered the doctor, and his teeth chattered. 'Can't!' repeated Lorraine, with a ghastly smile, yet somehow like a man in a trance: 'Oh, one *can* do anything. I never did it before, though.' He picked the poison ring out of the heap. Then he swiftly drew the young man's glove out of his hat on the table. There came a burst of speech from the inner room: 'I shall tell him you are a pack of thieves!' and Lorraine quietly slipped the ring inside a finger of the glove, a moment before its owner swung into the room. He clapped on his hat, furiously pulled on his gloves, and strode to the French windows. Then he flung them open wide upon the sunset, stepped out, and fell dead on the garden turf beyond. I remember his tall hat rolling down the slope, and how horrible it seemed that it should still be moving among the bushes, when he lay so still."

"He died like a soldier for a flag," said Forain.

"Perhaps you have already guessed," went on Valence, "the rest of the story. Hell itself must have inspired Lorraine that night, for the whole drama was his and worked out to the

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last detail. The difficulty in every murder is how to hide the corpse. He decided not to hide it, but to show it; I might say, to advertise it. He had been striding up and down the inner hall, his flexible face working with thought, when his eye caught the crossed swords on the trophy. 'This man died in a duel,' he said. 'In England he'd have died out duck-shooting. In France he died in a duel. If we all take the lighter blame, they will never look for heavier; it's a good rule with confessions,' and again he wore that awful smile. He not only staged the duel, but the drunken quarrel that was to explain it. They were quite right when they said the champagne was not sent for till after the boy's arrival. It was not sent for till after his death. They carefully scattered cards, carefully threw furniture about, and so on. By the way, they didn't shuffle the packs enough to deceive Monsieur Forain. Then they put Le Caron — the showiest — in his shirt-sleeves, did the same with the dead man, and then Lorraine deliberately passed the sword through the heart that had already ceased to beat. It seemed like a second murder, and a worse one. Then they carried him down in the dark, just before the dawn, so that no one could possibly see him save on the fighting ground. Lorraine thought of twenty little things; he took an old miniature of the countess from the cabinet and put it in the dead man's pocket, to put people off the scent — as it did. He left Mr. Crane's letter, because its warning against dissipation actually supported the story. It was all well fitted together, and if Le Caron hadn't put his foot on a cucumber-frame in the dark, I doubt if even Monsieur Forain would ever have found a hole in the business."

Margaret Crane walked firmly out of the offices of the *Sûreté*, but at the top of the steps outside she wavered and might almost have fallen. Forain caught her by the elbow, and they looked at each other for a space; then they went down the steps and down the street together. She had lost a brother in that black adventure, and what else she gained is no part of the tale of the five strange men, or, as she came to call it afterwards, the five of swords. Margaret asked one more question about it, and their talk afterwards was of deeply different matters. She only said: "Was it the wound you discovered on his finger that made you certain?"

"Partly his finger," he assented gravely, "and partly his face. There was something still fresh on his face that made me fancy already that he was no waster, but had died more than worthily. It was something young and yet nobler than youth, and more beautiful than beauty. It was something I had seen somewhere else. In fact, it was the converse, so to speak, of the case in Rostand's play, '*Monsieur de Bergerac, je suis ta cousine.*' "

"I don't understand you," she said.

"It was a family likeness," replied her companion.

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The name of Charles Francis Coe is a familiar one to readers of "The Saturday Evening Post." Mr. Coe is also a well-known lawyer whose knowledge and practice of the law aroused his interest in organized crime and led him, as it did with Arthur Train and Arthur Somers Roche before him, to writing about crooks and crookdom. "Socker" Coe has a particular talent for gangster stories, and it is indicative of his style and approach that he usually gave his stories one-word titles — like SWAG, HOOCH, VOTES, REPEAL, RANSOM, G-MAN, LIFER, KNOCKOUT, *to mention only some of his published work . . .*

"3 Men in a Room" represents another attempt by a prominent author to fuse the hardboiled style typical of "Black Mask" with the more softboiled kind of gangster story acceptable to slick magazines. Mr. Coe's homicidal hybridism lacks the extreme violence of the Hammett-Chandler school, but it is admittedly a lot tougher than most smooth-paper detective stories.

Well, it's a neat trick, this criminological crossbreeding, this steering a middle course between the Scylla of pulp and the Charybdis of slick, and it's mighty nice work — if you can get it.

3 MEN IN A ROOM

by CHARLES FRANCIS COE

THEY stood for a moment on the dark doorstep while Eddie sought his key. While they stood so, the door suddenly opened from within. The man with Eddie slipped back into the shadows of the street. Eddie said, "Hello, Mrs. Padder. It's just me."

"Oh," Mrs. Padder nodded. "It's you. Hello."

She stood aside to let them enter, gazed appraisingly upon the man with Eddie, who now rejoined him. Behind her a gloomy hall illumined by a single gas jet loomed.

"I got an old friend with me, Mrs. Padder. Joe Fennick. He comes from my home town. This is Mrs. Padder, Joe. She runs the roomin' house."

"T'meet cha."

"So you're from Eddie's home town?"

"Yeah. Eddie an' me know each other for years."

Eddie smiled and passed into the hall and Joe followed. Mrs. Padder shut the door and the spring lock snapped. Mrs. Padder studied the backs of the young men as they mounted the dingily carpeted stairs. Then she moved into the ground-floor back room which she occupied. There she settled herself beside an oil lamp. She puffed her pipe, which was strong and vociferous in the stem, and pon-

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dered the evening newspaper. Now and then she cocked her head to listen when someone moved overhead.

Eddie led the way to his room, struck a match, and fired the gas jet. From the flame he kindled a cigarette and tossed the packet to Joe Fennick.

"In a joint like this," he said softly, "you never know. Half of these roomin' house dames is in touch with the coppers and splittin' rewards for guys that is wanted. You never know."

"You wanted?"

"Me? No, I ain't wanted. But there's guys blowin' in here now an' then what I think is wanted."

"Guys? What guys?"

"None in p'tic'lar, Joe. Just guys. I been here about three months. That's a long time. Plenty happens in three months."

"Plenty is right."

"I just got a hunch one night that the old blister below was pullin' a fast one. They took some dopey-lookin' punk out of here that night."

"Coppers?"

"Yeah. I never had no truck with coppers, Joe, but I don't like 'em."

"Every guy to his own racket," Joe shrugged. He stepped to the gas flame and lighted his cigarette.

"You said it, Joe."

Eddie sank into a chair which squeaked under his weight. Joe found a seat on the edge of the narrow bed. The spring complained with a moan familiar to Eddie's ear but startling in volume. Joe said, "You been sleepin' in this gramophone for three months, Eddie?"

"Yeah. You know, I ain't much for movin'. Most places has got somethin' the matter with 'em."

"A guy can get used to anythin', I guess."

Joe's eyes roved over the room in a glance of appraisal. His lips twitched disdain. The window shade originally had been yellow but now it was brown and streaked with cracks and apertures. There were no other curtains. A nondescript table stood under the window, and this carried, as though the burden might momentarily become too great, a water pitcher, bowl, and tumbler. Hanging alongside, from a nail in the wall, was the towel. Beside the table was a white enamel pail, in places chipped.

The floor was covered with carpet in a deplorable state. The chair Eddie occupied was the kitchen type. The one other, to which Joe now moved, was upholstered, sunken in the seat.

Now cigarette smoke hung like wraiths given life and wavering in their attempt to find what to do with it. The window was closed; air stirred in the room only as the two moved and so generated currents.

"What's your home town?" Joe asked suddenly.

"Philly."

"Oh, Philly?"

"Yeah. I'm glad you asked me. That old blister might ask you. It ain't her that ever forgets or overlooks anythin'."

"That's why I asked you."

"Smart."

"She ain't apt to call the coppers

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just to look a guy over, is she?"

"No. But if you give her a reason to be suspicious, then I wouldn't trust her."

"It's dynamite. Why not blow the joint?"

"Well, think about that a minute. She wants all the dough she can get. She rather rent a room than turn up a guy that don't mean more'n rent. See what I mean? And coppers don't make a point of watchin' this place 'cause they figger she'll tip her mitt the minute anythin' hot shows here. That makes it safer'n any place, so long as you fool her. I heard about the dump from a guy that spent five months here while he was hot."

"How come you got all this figgered when you ain't wanted yourself?"

"I'm an understandin' guy," Eddie grinned genially. "An' who knows when he's apt to be wanted?"

Joe grinned broadly and nodded.

"Many guys livin' here, Eddie?"

"Five or six. Most of them don't mean nothin'. But there's one that does."

"Who?"

"Felly Tanger."

"He don't mean nothin'. I never even heard of him."

"That's his name now. He means somethin', too. I dunno what, yet."

"A smarty, you mean?"

"That's what I mean."

"Been here long?"

"Three, four weeks."

"An' you ain't got him sized up yet?"

"I'm takin' my time, Joe."

"Talked much to him?"

"Yeah. He's smart, Joe. Our kind. He's got the lingo. Wait, I got a pint here. I'll ask him in for a hiccough with us, if you like."

Joe calculated a moment; then, "Sure. Let's get a load of him."

Eddie went down the shadowy hall to the rear room. Below, Mrs. Padder let the paper fall into her lap as she listened. Her seamy face was wrapped in an expression of wonderment; her eye was calculating. She heard the soft tapping on Felly's door. She heard the door open. She took her pungent pipe from between her teeth and listened for footsteps returning. Shortly she heard them, and she knew that Felly had gone to Eddie's room where also waited this visitor from Eddie's home town. About this she wondered vaguely.

"This is Felly Tanger, Joe. Felly, this is Joe Fennick, an old pal of mine from the home town."

"Haryuh?"

"T'meet cha."

"We was just sittin' here gassin', Felly. I got to sayin' there wasn't no important-lookin' mugs in this joint, outside you, so Joe says mebbe you wasn't doin' nothin' and we could pass an hour gabbin'."

"Swell," said Felly. He was narrow-eyed, furtive.

Joe nodded.

Eddie said, "I got a pint of rye here. I'll break it out if you guys can take it with plain warm water."

"I never needed no water, plain or fancy," Felly grinned, "to slip the bill

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into a noggin of grog."

"Me neither," Joe avowed.

Eddie laughed. He drew a suitcase from under the bed and dragged forth a pint bottle.

He held the towel about the bottle and twisted off the metal top. Felly was filling the tumbler from the water pitcher. Eddie held the bottle toward Joe.

"Climb in." Joe waved.

Eddie took a pull and snatched the water from Felly's hand and chased the drink as he passed the bottle to Joe. Joe passed it to Felly and Felly drank. He took the tumbler, cleared his throat, and passed the water untouched to Joe, who had taken the whisky.

"I don't want to water that stuff," he avowed. "That's good, Eddie."

Felly sat on the bed, Eddie on the kitchen chair, Joe in the big chair. They smoked.

"Kinda warm in here?" Eddie asked.

"Kinda. But I'd rather be warm an' private. Open a window an' everybody in the block knows your business."

They sprawled, waited for conversation to make itself.

"This blister downstairs ain't so hot," Eddie said softly. "I wouldn't trust her for a nickel."

"She wouldn't you," Felly grinned. "That's even."

"You know what I mean," Eddie said.

"Sure I do. But she'll let a guy alone that lets her alone. I know from a guy that gave the joint a play when he wasn't doin' no visitin'."

"Unless she sees a dime to be made outa him, a guy is snug here."

"That's it. But she ain't got a chance to make a dime outa me."

"Me neither," Eddie grinned in satisfaction.

"Me neither," Joe augmented.

Then they were silent for a few minutes, each waiting for the other to speak.

"You gotta take these places as they come," Felly said finally. "There's lots of times it makes me sore that this Padder dame won't allow no gals in the house. But when I ain't gal-minded," he grinned, "I realize that's mebbe a swell break."

"Gals," Joe said sententiously, "is oke in their place. When I want a gal, I want one, but I got sense enough to get one I can pay off an' leave without no great an' lingerin' love to drive her desperate an' me into a jam."

"Yeah," Eddie said. "Gals is dynamite. They got sense but they don't use it."

"No?" Felly laughed abruptly; in his voice harshness. "Check up some day an' find out who spends all the money in this country. It's gals, if that'll save you the trouble of huntin'."

"Well, you know what I mean."

"You can't get along without 'em," Felly said. "There's somethin' inside a guy that goes for 'em. He can't help it. Like when he gets a cold. There's a cough goes with it. He didn't want the cold, an' he hates the cough, an'

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he don't know where neither comes from. But there they are. It's like that with gals."

"Experience?" Joe grinned.

"Nope. Just watchin'," Felly allowed.

"The biggest an' best guys an' the smartest go for the dames all right," Eddie mused. "Look at Costi. . . ."

"What was the matter with Costi?" Felly asked. "You tell me. Do you know the guy personal?"

"Me?" Eddie gasped. "Me know Costi personal? I wish I did!"

"Then why crack that dames was smarter'n Costi? How could you know?"

"Wasn't it a gal that turned him up when he had to shoot his way clear?"

"Where is Costi?" Felly sneered by way of additional argument.

"Who knows? The guy is plenty smart. They been huntin' him plenty an' he thumbs his nose at 'em."

"Don't talk about things you know nothin' about, Eddie. I think this Costi is the nuts."

"I was only sayin', Felly. I think he's a great guy too."

After a moment Felly said, "If a dame tripped up Costi, what about Malu? Ain't they sayin' the same thing about that guy? Ain't he smart too?"

"I'll say he is," Joe grunted. "The G-boys has been tailin' him for near six months, but they don't catch up with him. He's smart, that guy."

"Smarter'n Costi?" Felly queried.

"Who knows? They both shot it out a coupla times, an' they're still walkin' the big wide world. You got to take your skimmer off to guys like that."

"I'll say," Felly nodded. "But Costi is smarter'n Malu. He's got away with more."

"More what?"

"Dough. He stuck up seven banks in three months. Got plenty. Now he's livin' the life of Riley somewhere. That's smart."

"Sure. Malu got near half a million from one mail truck. He ain't doin' so bad hisself, I guess."

"They're both smart. But read the papers. Costi is better known than Malu."

"Depends on the papers you read. I'll take Malu for mine," Joe grunted.

"The only real trouble they had was through dames, though," Eddie said slowly. "Both of 'em had to shoot their way out of jams over fluffs."

"I suppose they got to have their pleasures, like anybody else," Felly allowed.

"Dames won't cause me no jams," Joe said. "Every time I see a twist with a lurkin' somethin' about her, I think of dames like Mrs. Padder. They all get there. That way I can think myself out of a big love scene."

"Lots of guys marries an' gets happy," Eddie said.

"Look at the kind that does," Felly scorned.

Both nodded. Eddie subsided. He rose and lifted the top from the white enamel pail and dropped his cigarette into the receptacle. It died with a hiss.

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"I got to take my lid off to both them guys," he said. "Costi an' Malu both. They're hot shots. The people are gettin' to a point where they feel the same. After all, you got to go for a guy that does whatever he does an' does it awful good. Them guys has plenty nerve an' plenty brains. I'd hate to think what they'd do if they ever got together!"

That thought held them a moment. On the strength of it, Felly reached again for the bottle and drank from its neck. He passed it to Joe, and Joe drank, lifted the bottle to measure with his eye the remaining contents, took another sip to equalize, and passed the bottle to Eddie. Eddie poured his chaser and drank. He lit another smoke. So did the others.

"I ain't sayin' they wouldn't be a tough combination to beat," Felly said. "But Malu needs Costi more'n Costi needs Malu."

"Why?" Joe asked. "Ain't they both on the lam? Both are stick-up guys on their own. There ain't a better machine-gun man in the world than Malu, I hear."

"You got somethin' to love that guy about?" Felly asked.

"Me? No. When a guy gets as public as Malu, everybody takes an interest in him. He makes news."

"So does Costi."

"Sure. I was only sayin': Mebbe it's 'cause Malu is from the East an' Costi the Middle West. You know, I'm from the East. I read more about Malu."

"Mebbe that's it. There's more in the Eastern papers about a guy from the East."

"That's right. Mebbe that's it. That's good grog, Eddie. Where'd you get it?"

"Down the street. I don't buy in public places." He laughed abruptly. "Reasons of my own. I pay plenty. I can only get it in pints. It's doctor stuff."

"I'll go for a couple pints if you can get 'em." Joe dug a roll of bills out of his pocket. He peeled off a twenty and offered it to Eddie. Eddie took it.

"I'll get some, fellers. It is good booze. I won't be gone long. You know how it is. Even buyin' grog after hours is gettin' tough these days."

He caught up his hat and jammed it on. He paused at the door, winked. "I wouldn't talk loud," he said. "Not that it matters, but the blister downstairs likes everybody's business better'n her own."

The two nodded. Eddie slipped through the door, closed it after him, then reopened it and went back into the room. "I'll have to have the bottle," he said. "This doctor ain't got no license. He sells to me as a favor. Five bucks a pint, but worth it." He winked slowly. "An' nobody sees me when I buy it."

"Get four pints if you can," Joe said.

He caught up the bottle and passed it to Eddie. Eddie took it and went again into the hall. He closed the door and went softly down the stairs. In her room Mrs. Padder cocked her ear, laid aside her pipe, dropped her paper.

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She rose and went to her door. Gently she opened it and was standing there when Eddie reached the lower hall. She regarded him frankly but they exchanged no words. Eddie opened the door and passed into the night.

In twenty minutes Eddie returned and she was there in the hall again.

"Been on an errand," he said. "Ain't you sleepy tonight, Mrs. Padder?"

"I was readin'."

"Joe an' me been talkin'."

"Joe an' you?"

"Yeah. An' Mr. Tanger. He wasn't doin' nothin', so he come in too."

The woman nodded. Eddie mounted the stairs and went to his room again.

"He didn't have no bottles," he said. "I could only get this one refilled. He has to be careful. But I can go back if we want more."

Felly reached for the bottle, opened it, and drank appreciatively. He passed it to Joe, and Joe drank. Eddie poured his chaser and drank after them.

"Honest," Eddie said then, "I'll lay three to one that dame Padder knows how many bristles is missin' from your toothbrush. She don't miss a thing."

"Did she case you goin' out?"

"Plenty."

They lit cigarettes. Felly said finally, "Me an' Joe has talked."

"Yeah?"

"Plenty. We got the same lingo."

"I knew it," Eddie gloated. "I was tellin' Joe the same thing before I went for you."

"Yeah?"

"You can tell a smarty with one quick look, Felly."

"If you happen to be a smarty," Felly amended.

"Sure."

"We know where there is some dough to be glommed."

"Well, that's what we're here for."

Joe said, "Me an' Felly has ideas, Eddie. It's up to you whether you want to go along. Why let big shots like Costi an' Malu cop all the dough? They ain't got nothin' we ain't."

"Depends," Eddie grunted slyly.

"On what? You losin' your nerve?"

"Not Eddie! I was thinkin' about the score; an' the split."

"Me an' Felly will do the business. You watch for us. We got what it takes. We'll give you a quarter of the score, if you can drive a car."

"After me bringin' you together I get a quarter, eh?"

"Why not? We're takin' the chances. You'll be outside, with a chance to peg first. We'll be inside, takin' our chances on gettin' out if a break comes along."

"What you shootin' for?"

"A bank. Noon job. The streets is crowded then. Coppers are afraid to shoot."

"It's rough stuff, fellers."

"You're tellin' us? It may be rough but it ain't risky, the way we do it."

"Where would I be watchin'?"

"In the car."

"I'm to drive, is that it?"

"That's the soft part of the job."

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"When you goin' to pull it?"

"Tomorrow — next day. We want to watch the plant a day or so. We'll have to get the car an' steal some plates for it. We want it gassed an' oiled an' new tires."

Eddie pondered. The others drank again.

"Well?" Felly asked sharply.

"There's as much risk to me as to you," Eddie complained.

"You needn't come in at all," Joe said simply. "We figgered we was decent, lettin' you in."

"You was. But, after all . . ."

"It lays the way we thrun it," Felly snapped. "Take it or leave it, Eddie."

Eddie appraised them. At last he nodded. "I take it."

"Smart," Joe said.

"There'll be more jobs later," Felly said. "You're in with guys that knows their stuff, Eddie. We'll make Costi an' Malu look like a coupla brush salesmen."

"That's what I figgered."

They drank again. Lit more cigarettes. Joe threw away a crumpled packet. Eddie said, "I'll go get some more smokes before it's too late." He rose, reached again for his hat.

Joe took up the tumbler, drained it carefully, filled it with liquor. There was a little left in the bottle and he drank it. He handed the bottle to Eddie.

"While you're out," he said, "have it filled again."

Eddie nodded, took the bottle. In the lower hall he met Mrs. Padder again. She said nothing.

"What's the matter?" Eddie asked her. "You watchin' me?"

"I have to know what goes on in the house," she said. "That's all."

"Can't gentlemen have a visit in their own rooms?"

"Is anybody botherin' you?"

"I can't move without you . . ."

"It's my house. I gotta be careful."

"Sure. That's oke with me. But . . ."

"Your friend ain't from Philly."

"Who says so?"

"He's from Boston way. I can tell by the way he says his r's. I've had roomers from Boston. I know."

"He was borned in Boston but he lives in Philly. Anythin' the matter with that? If you don't like us, we can move out."

"It ain't that. I was only lookin' after my place. Everythin' depends on reputation in this business."

"It must. You don't give a guy nothin' else. You could sharpen a razor on my mattress!"

Eddie went out. Mrs. Padder stood again in the hall, her ear cocked. She stood a long time. When she heard Eddie again on the step outside, she slipped into her room, closed the door, and picked up the telephone there, called a number and asked for a man. The man was out.

"Have him call me," she ordered brusquely. "Tell 'im it's red-hot."

She hung up. She seated herself again in the easy chair, slipped her feet out of her slippers. Then she found her pipe, struck a match, and smoked and rocked. After a long time

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she caught up the paper and read the astrological feature. She fought off slumber. Impatiently she now and then glanced at the telephone.

It was nearly midnight when she went to the front stoop and stood peering along the street. Few people were abroad. It was nearly one when the telephone rang. She hastened to it.

"This is McCarthy," a voice announced. "What's so hot, Biddy?"

"Come around," Mrs. Padder said softly. "Bring some guys with you."

"You got some specimens?"

"Come an' take a look. I think they're hot. I want my end now, if this works."

"We'll be over, beautiful. How's the old sex appeal tonight? I been around to the night clubs an' you'll be a treat after all them lousy-lookin' chorus dames. . . ."

"Shut up an' come over here," Mrs. Padder snapped. But she was smiling when she returned to the front porch. "That McCarthy!" she tittered.

Shortly five men appeared. Police. She walked down the steps in her stocking feet and met them. They gathered in the deep shadows characteristic of the street.

"There's three of 'em," she said. "Felly Tanger — been here near a month. Very quiet but looks tough. Eddie Ross — been here three months. Nice enough but never works, as I can see. Tonight he brought a third guy — named Joe Fennick. Said he was from Philly but I know he's from around Boston by the way he talks. The three of them is havin' a shindig in Ross's room. He's been out a coupla times. Booze, I guess. But they're quiet."

"So what?" McCarthy asked.

"Look 'em over. I think they're hot. You got a right to come in an' take a look-see. This is a roomin' house. The city ordinance permits it. Take a look."

McCarthy pondered. One of the men said, "She's right, Mac. Let's case the joint."

"Lead the way," McCarthy snapped softly. "You knock on the door, then we'll do the talkin'."

Softly the men followed Mrs. Padder in and up the stairs. She paused at the door until they surrounded her. From the room came the murmur of voices pitched low. Mrs. Padder knocked.

"Who's there? Whatcha want?" The voice was Eddie's.

"It's Mrs. Padder," she said. "Can I come in?"

"You can if you want to."

McCarthy opened the door and three of the men slipped inside. Felly and Eddie and Joe rose in anger.

"What's the idea?" Felly demanded.

"Nothin' much," McCarthy answered gently. "If we hadn't heard you gents talkin', we wouldn't have bothered you. We're police officers on a routine inspection of roomin' houses."

"Well, this joint can stand some inspection, chief!"

"Think so?"

The other two men were in the

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room now. All of them were studying the faces of the three occupants. In the dim light of the gas jet they made no secret of their purpose. There was tensity. After a long time McCarthy said to his men, "Everythin' all right, fellahs?"

None answered. McCarthy smiled at the three. "Sorry we bothered you, but you know how it is. We have to case these joints every so often. There's plenty roughies around town just now an' we don't want 'em to get away with anythin'."

"Sure," Joe nodded. "Sure. We see how that is."

The men withdrew. They closed the door and went noisily down the stairs. Mrs. Padder followed them. On the front stoop she asked, "You don't know them?"

"Nary a know," McCarthy said. "They don't look like boys escaped from a choir, but we got nothin' more to go on. We'll keep tabs on 'em for a few days."

Mrs. Padder was disappointed, as her manner showed. She returned to her room, cocked her ear again and listened, finally bolted her door and retired. She slept.

Just before three o'clock, two men appeared across the street from the house. In the deep shadows there, they waited. Presently two more men appeared and took up stations near the front stoop of Mrs. Padder's place. In the course of half an hour there were eight men in the street, all inconspicuous to the casual eye. Then a car turned into the street at the next corner. It came to a stop some doors away from the Padder place. One man remained at the wheel, another slipped into the street and looked about him. He flashed a tiny light. Other lights along the street flashed an answer.

The man walked to the Padder stoop. There he was met by five other men. On the stoop, the last comer drew the five heads close about him. He whispered.

"Alive if possible, understand? But one way or the other. I don't want to lose any of you boys tonight. You know how hot this is. Give these mugs every chance but the big one."

The men nodded. The speaker slipped a key into the Padder door. It opened without noise. The men entered, closed the door softly behind them. In the street a cordon of men moved closer to the tomblike house. It was so in the street behind the house, and even on the roofs of adjoining houses. Silent men were there, a small army of them, each assigned to given duty, each fulfilling that duty silently and perfectly.

Inside the house the six mounted the stairs. In the murky light of the hall flashes of illumination glinted on the barrels of revolvers they carried in their hands. They took their time mounting the narrow stairs. They gathered close about the door of Eddie Ross. When all was ready, the leader pressed his ear close, listened. He caught the same droning of subdued voices. For just a second he hesitated, then he turned his head,

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nodded once. With his left hand he seized the doorknob, with his right he leveled his pistol and crouched low. At his shoulders the others poised, towering above him.

He threw open the door. The men leaped into the room. The three occupants rose excitedly.

"Up with 'em!" the leader snapped. "This is no foolin'!"

Six pistols covered the three men. Only Felly was slow in raising his hands. To him the leader barked another sharp command. Felly snarled, slowly raised his hands, the right pausing at the left armpit. A pistol barked and Felly staggered back. He writhed, his arm flailing. A man held him on the floor while another slipped bright handcuffs about his wrists.

"You asked for it, rat," a man said steadily. "Long enough, now, you've had it coming to you."

"What's this?" Joe snarled. "More roomin' house inspection?"

"Who *are* you guys?" Eddie Ross asked.

Men gathered about these two and forced their arms low again, handcuffing their wrists together behind their right knees. So they were helpless. The leader regarded Felly. He spoke to the man who had fired.

"Bad?"

"Shoulder, I think. Let's look."

They tore aside Felly's shirt and one of the men placed a folded handkerchief over a ragged wound torn through the flesh of the shoulder. Felly was whimpering. He was ghastly pale. The leader took his small flashlight from his pocket and played the beam on Felly's face.

"Plastic surgery, eh, Costi?" He grinned. "Not bad, at that!"

"You're nuts!" Felly whimpered. "I ain't Costi. I ain't nobody you want. . . ."

The leader was smiling broadly. "This is where it got you. Rich, but living like a pauper in a cheap rooming house. Mutilated for life, suffering tortures of pain, hiding away like a skunk in a hole, and this is what it paid you. Well, the more of you guys they make, the more often this will happen."

He straightened. He glared at Joe Fennick.

"Hello, Malu," he smiled wryly, his light playing on Joe's features. "You too, eh? Plastic surgery . . ."

"Anyway, it wasn't a dame that tipped you guys off," Malu snarled. He glared triumphantly at Costi.

Mrs. Padder was in the doorway. "It was too," she avowed. "I done it. I heard them names. These are Costi an' Malu. There's thousands in rewards . . . I want . . ."

Her voice failed her, she trembled with avaricious excitement.

"Shut up," the leader said, "or we'll take you along for harboring known criminals and fugitives. Malu is right. It was no dame that tipped us off. It was these mugs themselves. Fingerprints. Fingerprints on a bottle. A whisky bottle. We had two shots at them tonight, just to be sure. Master minds, these birds are. Big shots. Desperadoes . . . nuts!"

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He turned to his men. "Take that whining skunk to a hospital for a dressing. Then lock him up. You," to Malu, "walk as well as you can to the car in the street. Take him along, boys. Frisk him first."

The men set to work at their appointed tasks. They had to help the whimpering Costi to his feet. To Eddie Ross the leader now turned his attention.

"Nice mess you got yourself into," he said thoughtfully. "What's the big idea?"

"I never done nothin'," Eddie whined. "I met these guys here. I never knowed who they was."

Costi and Malu were led away. The leader and one man remained with Eddie. Mrs. Padder was ordered below. Other roomers crowded into the hall now. There was a crowd gathering in the street below. A pistol shot in that neighborhood was a summons to the curious. When the room was cleared, the leader shut the door. From his pocket he withdrew a long tubular key. He inserted this in the lock of Eddie's cuffs. Eddie was free. He straightened, smiled.

"You needn't bother any more," the leader smiled. "It's a smash identification, Ed."

"Good. They're a fine pair. They were robbing a bank tomorrow or next day."

"They've changed their plans from now on," the leader grinned.

"Yeah. Say, what about this Ganni, on the Coast? He seems to have gone berserk . . ."

"You've guessed it again, Ed. Take a hop out there. We want him next."

"We'll get him," Eddie said. "We get them all."

"Or," the leader said quietly, "they get themselves."

Mrs. Padder was back. "I want the reward. I got a right to it. I tipped the police. They was here earlier, but they was dumb. That's where you got wise to them hoodlums."

Her eye fell on Eddie. Her brows jerked upward in surprise. Eddie smiled slowly.

"It's too bad, Mrs. Padder. Here. I'll pay a month's room rent, just for notice."

He handed her some bills. She took them complainingly. Eddie caught up the bottle of whisky with its small remainder of content.

"This," he said, "is really good whisky, Mrs. Padder. Perhaps a drink would help you. Good night!"

The leader of the men reached suddenly into his trousers' pocket and withdrew a door key. "Until just a little while ago, madam, this key was used by Mr. Ross, your roomer. That's how we got into the house. Don't say he failed to return it."

As the two departed, Mrs. Padder muttered, "I'll bet they'll go right out an' split that reward with McCarthy. Nowadays there ain't nobody to be trusted!"

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THE SCARECROW MURDERS

by A. E. MARTIN

Monsieur Roget, a respectable grocer of Paris, on his way to the bank, was one day stopped in the deserted Rue Grenoir by a tall, thin man wearing a black overcoat that barely reached his knees. It was tightly buttoned and although the weather was mild, the collar had been turned up to hide the neck. The coat was shiny from long use and where it had been torn, it had been clumsily patched. At first glance the good grocer thought he might be talking to one smitten with an unfortunate disease, for two spots of color glowed on either side of the short black beard, matching the imitation red rose in the buttonhole. And then, he thought, this incongruous stranger might be a youth who had grown too fast; but this, he reflected, was discounted by the shagginess of the eyebrows. In any case, with his white gloves and bulging umbrella, his absurd hat with its band of green stripes from beneath which straggled wisps of straight black hair, he was a veritable scarecrow of a man.

Monsieur Roget, conscious of the money-bag in his hip pocket, was not inclined to linger but the stranger was standing over him, bending a little, and tapping him familiarly on the shoulder.

"So that is the residence of the advocate, Henri Faure?" he asked, pointing with his baggy umbrella.

Truly this stranger must be an eccentric in mind as well as dress, the grocer thought. "No, no, m'sieur," he explained, painstakingly, "*That*, as I have said, is the residence of M'sieur the Chief of Police. In here," he indicated the building alongside which they were standing, "on the second floor is the apartment of M'sieur the advocate."

"Ah!" The stranger drew himself up to his full height. "All is now made clear. So, if I should murder M. Faure, I would have but to step across the road afterwards and give myself up to M'sieur the Policeman. On the other hand," he shrugged his shoulders, "if I chose to murder the policeman, I have but to cross the street to secure for myself the services of an advocate. I thank you, m'sieur." He bent his head, sniffed the artificial flower in his buttonhole, then, raising his hat politely, remarked, "The weather is very nice for September, is it not?"

"Why, yes," M'sieur Roget said, hesitantly, forgetting the man's earlier words in his astonishment that one should speak of September when it was as yet only May. Convinced that he had to do with a lunatic, he said a little breathlessly, "You will excuse me, m'sieur. . . ."

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"But certainly, m'sieur," the stranger replied, obligingly, and as the grocer hurried off, called after him, "Give my regards to your good father."

As M. Roget hurried on, he thought to himself he would certainly have gossip and to spare that afternoon. Recounting his meeting with the *original*, he discovered that several of his customers had observed the queer character, smiled at the oddity of his dress, and noted his trick of smelling the flower in his buttonhole which was so manifestly imitation, but none had held discourse with him and M. Roget's was the unique experience of being requested to bear felicitations to a father who had been dead for thirty years.

Charles, a waiter at the Café Colette, was in due course to rival the grocer as the centre of gossip, for he had had, it seems, a trifling argument with the stranger. According to Charles, and although, as it became apparent later, the man had already gleaned the information from M. Roget, he had enquired again of the waiter regarding the address of M. Faure.

"He is an advocate," the scarecrow had explained. "A fiery fellow sixty, with red hair."

"But no," Charles had protested. "He is of a disposition most amiable, no more than forty-five, and of a figure distinguished though a little plump."

"With five children, no doubt," the stranger had said, perversely.

Again Charles had protested. "M. Faure is a bachelor," he had informed the stranger. "Should I not know, for does he not dine here every evening and do I not have the honor of waiting upon him?"

"A profligate, assuredly."

"M'sieur," Charles had retorted with some heat. "M. Faure is of a morality impeccable, his professional integrity beyond question. Every night he goes from the Café Colette to his apartment and works hard in preparation for next day's cases in the courts."

"Why not to his office?" the stranger had asked.

"Because, m'sieur," Charles had told the inquisitive one, "in his apartment in the Rue Grenoir, as he has often told me, he lives alone, and in the quietness of the neighborhood his brain functions with a clarity impossible when one is liable to interruptions."

"It is not good for a man to be alone," the stranger had said with seeming irrelevance and added, Charles remembered, with some ferocity, "I am tired of hearing of this man's virtues. It has given me a headache. If I hear more of him, I shall have to do something about it."

Nettled, Charles had left him. Later he had been astonished beyond measure to see the stranger pour a powder into a glass of water and while it was still fizzing carry the tumbler to the curb and spill the untasted liquid into the gutter. He had resolved to tell M. Faure of the conversation he had had with the tall man and was about to recount the story of the spilled water to the proprietor of

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the café when, as luck would have it, there came an excited telephone message acquainting him of the arrival of his first baby. His employer, a good fellow, had slapped him on the back and told him to take a couple of hours off to see his wife and welcome the infant. It was a lovely girl baby of a weight formidable but, so far as M. Faure was concerned, it had chosen a most inopportune moment for arrival. Had she delayed her birth by half an hour, M. Faure might have been forewarned.

Two hours after Charles had set out for his wife's bedside and as the clock was striking nine, the incongruous stranger walked into the building in the Rue Grenoir in which Monsieur Faure occupied the second floor. His clumsy shoes resounded on the stone floor of the entrance hall startling a fat, middle-aged lady who was locking her door preparatory to rushing for an omnibus due to depart from a short block away at five past the hour. With a feminine eye for detail, she had been able, later in court, to testify to his exact appearance, and her testimony so closely tallied with evidence given by M. Roget the grocer and Charles the waiter that there was not the slightest doubt in the mind of the examining magistrate as to whom the police should seek.

She related how the stranger had first raised his silly hat and inquired for M. Faure, how she had told him the advocate occupied the floor above, and how he had thanked her, fingering his buttonhole meanwhile, and politely conversational, remarked on the absence of snow. She had seen him go clumping up the stairs, one of his white-gloved hands spread over the railing to steady himself, and it was only because she had perspired freely while hurrying for the bus that she recalled it was a summer night and, of course, not at all surprising that there should be no snow.

If M. Faure was not astonished at the oddity of the creature standing on his door-mat, it was possibly because he was accustomed to having queer people seek his advice. Indeed, although few knew it, he kept many appointments at his apartment in the Rue Grenoir with persons of dubious reputation who shunned the publicity attendant on a visit to his city address.

His visitor said, "M. Faure, of course. May I come in?" He hurried on. "I must apologize for coming at this hour but I must leave Paris immediately my business is complete."

"And what is your business, m'sieur?"

"Escaping."

"Indeed." M. Faure wondered briefly whether the fellow had escaped from an asylum. He certainly looked like it. If so, it would be better to humor him. "Come in," he said and led the way to his desk. Taking his seat, he invited the other to sit opposite.

The gaunt visitor placed his ridiculous hat beside him and leaned his bulging umbrella against the side of the desk. "I have something to show you which I fancy will merit your

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attention, m'sieur," he announced. "But first I must insist upon privacy."

"We are quite alone," the advocate assured him. "And I am expecting no one for an hour."

"An hour? That will be ample." Rising from his chair, he produced a small key. "Examine it, m'sieur, if you please," he begged, and while M. Faure took the tiny thing, wondering, slowly removed one of his white gloves and placed it in the pocket of his buttoned topcoat.

"It appears to be nothing more than a key," the advocate said, smiling, handing it back.

"As you say," the tall man agreed. "There are times when one would give much for a key. When one has been locked out or, perhaps, locked in." He shrugged. "But I ride my hobby." He held the key on the palm of his naked hand. "Here is the key — but *now* where is it, m'sieur?"

He had no more than turned his hand so that the palm for an instant was facing the floor and then was once more upward, but the key was gone.

M. Faure said, "Very good." He had a boyish curiosity about conjuring. Sleight-of-hand, in particular, had always intrigued him and he was now enjoying the experience of an intimate and private exhibition. The stranger repeated the movement of his hand and again the key lay on his palm; another movement and it had vanished.

Intrigued, M. Faure asked, "May I, as a favor, inspect the back of your hand? I have always wondered . . ."

"But certainly," his visitor agreed readily and spread his long fingers in front of the advocate's nose, holding his hand in a horizontal position; then, allowing the fingers to fall limply, he permitted M. Faure to examine each in turn. There was no key.

"You are very good, indeed," M. Faure said, admiringly.

"It is necessary to be good when one has to get out of tight spots," the other said. He thrust his hands in his side pocket. "As I said, M. Faure, I am an escapologist. But, of course, it is all done by trickery. I am sure you will never abuse my confidence."

"Certainly not," the advocate said, promptly.

The tall man had produced a pair of handcuffs. "Now these are really not as formidable as they appear," he explained. "See, I thrust my wrists through. Kindly snap them." He held out his hands and M. Faure obligingly did as he was told. "Now," his visitor went on, holding his hands aloft, "anyone watching would say I was securely handcuffed. Is it not so?"

"True, indeed," M. Faure agreed, for he had not only snapped the handcuffs but had tested their security.

"And yet," the stranger said, "I have only to wish and . . . *voila*". The handcuffs fell with the faintest plop onto the thick carpet.

"Extraordinary," M. Faure commented, leaning his elbows on the desk and resting his chin on his clasped hands. After all, he thought, the fellow promises to be entertaining.

His visitor had stooped and retriev-

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ing the handcuffs, placed them in his side pocket. "It is of childish simplicity," he explained, "but I alone have stumbled on the idea. Yet, already, there are those trying to steal my invention."

"Ah," M. Faure thought, "now we are coming to the reason for this visit. He wants me to protect his rights. He is a showman and that accounts for the eccentricity of his dress.

"Although it looks simple," the gaunt man was saying, "it took a long time to think out. I spent many, many solitary hours puzzling over it. Is it just that I should not benefit?"

"By no means," the advocate agreed.

"See," the other said, suddenly thrusting his hand in his pocket again and producing the handcuffs. "I shall demonstrate to you. I will, indeed, give you this pair with which you may astonish your friends and, perhaps, even the police. It is a matter of sustained pressure. All that is necessary is to extend your hands, over your head for preference, pulling each cuff away from the other as though you were a prisoner trying to snap your chains. The secret is in the timing. Over-eagerness must be avoided. From the moment the handcuffs are snapped on, you begin to count ten. In a little while you will find you will be able to carry on a disarming conversation while actually counting. At the moment you reach ten, tug slightly and the handcuffs will fall. Here, try them."

M. Faure had been leaning forward interestedly, his elbows still on his blotting pad. He had been thinking of himself, as a matter of fact, as the life of some party. He had no social attainments to speak of and he felt that the knowledge of a little magic might very conceivably prove a worth-while asset. With these thoughts in his mind he was taken completely off guard when the stranger suddenly seized his wrists and before he could utter a word of protest, had handcuffed him. A little shocked at his client's informality and secretly annoyed that he should have been placed in such an undignified position, he nevertheless contrived a sheepish grin. "Dear, dear," he said.

The tall man had retrieved the white glove he had previously removed and was casually drawing it on as he spoke. "Now, all that is needed is imagination, my friend. You must say to yourself, 'I am on my way to prison. I have received a sentence of ten years. I do not like the feel of my handcuffs. I shall get out of them.' And all the while you must be counting."

Feeling perfectly ridiculous, Faure lifted his manacled hands above his head. His lips moved as he counted softly. "One, two, three . . ."

"Oh, much too quickly," the man opposite interrupted. "Time does not pass so swiftly. Imagine you are experimenting in escaping from imprisonment — wrongful imprisonment, of course — and do not permit yourself to be too eager lest the disappointment of first failures discourage you. Now, again. One . . . reflect; two

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. . . reflect."

The advocate frowned. He hoped none of his friends would select this inopportune time to call upon him, for he was a man accustomed to deference and the mere thought of ridicule horrified him. Averting his eyes, he began to count again, his arms uplifted, the chain of the handcuffs taut. It seemed an interminable time to him before he reached ten and gave the little tug, as directed.

"Ten," he repeated, aloud and with emphasis, and waited. Nothing happened.

The escapologist regarded him gravely. "Too bad," he said. "You'll have to try again."

"I'm afraid I'm not much good at this sort of thing," M. Faure began.

"Nonsense," the tall man interrupted. "You must have patience. You mustn't weaken. You didn't become an advocate overnight, did you? Come, count again. One to ten."

A little red in the face, M. Faure began counting silently. The palms of his hands were damp and he could feel sweat dripping from his arm-pits and trickling down the inside of his shirt-sleeves. When he had reached ten and still nothing happened, he let his aching wrists fall upon his desk.

"I give up," he said. "Undo them."

"Oh, you mustn't be vanquished so easily," his visitor admonished. "Just imagine, as I said, that you are in jail and trying to escape. You want to get out among your friends. See your sweetheart, perhaps. You wouldn't despair after the first disappointment."

"But I'm not in jail," Faure retorted, testily. He managed a half-hearted laugh. "I fear I'd make a poor magician."

"Try once more," he was urged. "Count silently. Meanwhile, I want to show you something else." The man lifted his bulging umbrella, thrust a hand under the cover and separated it from the stick, which he leaned against the side of the desk. His long, gloved fingers began working on what was left, manipulating the apparently broken ribs. The wrecked thing began to take shape. The steel ribs became the frame, the collapsed black-satin covering the walls of a small bag. There was even a handle. He placed it on the desk. "Neat, eh?" he said.

"Very good," M. Faure admitted, panting from his exertion, "but if you would please unlock . . ."

"Naturally," the visitor said, shrugging slightly, "it is quite unsubstantial, but who would know?"

M. Faure was straining at the handcuffs, no longer interested in magic. "Something has gone wrong," he said.

The other made no sign that he had heard. He picked up the desk telephone and casually set it on a distant chair. "Now, this bag and all the other gadgets should be covered by legal copyright," he announced. "This coat, for instance."

Taking off the shabby, black thing, with a few dexterous shakes he had turned it inside out. The lining which had now become the outer material was of the finest velour cloth. "Elegant, eh?" he murmured, putting it

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on again; buttoning it, and turning down the coat collar to reveal a spotless shirt collar and neat tie. "No sign of poverty nor eccentricity. Much smarter than before."

"Much," Faure grunted, interested only in freeing himself from the handcuffs. The end of his nose began to itch and he was forced to raise his manacled wrists to relieve the irritation. He said sharply, "M'sieur, I must insist . . ."

"But still a little short," the escapologist ventured, imperturbably, ignoring him and looking down at the coat, critically. "I'm afraid I must do a little tailoring. But, first, I'll lock the door against intruders. All magicians guard their secrets jealously — from all except their advocates, of course." In two long strides he was at the door and turning the key. "You don't mind?"

M. Faure minded very much. Since the moment the handcuffs had been snapped upon his wrists, he had felt foolish and uncomfortable in turn. Now, he was beginning to feel a little uneasy — not to say, alarmed. The locking of the door had given the whole ridiculous affair a touch of the sinister. But for the life of him the hapless advocate could not think of a way to deal with the situation. The stranger had made no threats, given no indication that he was other than an eccentric, excessively proud of his absurd inventions and M. Faure tried to assure himself that he was perfectly harmless. He looked harmless enough but, then, you never could tell.

As these thoughts rushed through his mind — he had given up imagining he could ever free himself of the wretched handcuffs by his own efforts — the tall man was saying, "But we were going to remedy the shortness of the coat. We can't lengthen it without more material and as we can't lengthen the coat, we must shorten the man."

He sat down where M. Faure could see him plainly and close enough, the advocate thought uneasily, to push him back in his chair should he attempt to move; then he stooped quickly and in a trice the soles and heels of his clumsy shoes came away in his hands. Not all the soles, however, M. Faure noted, for there still remained the thinnest of bottoms to support the uppers. The false soles were at least four inches in thickness, with heels to match, and he set them on the desk beside the bag. He then slipped off both shoes and removed an inch thickness of inner soles.

When he replaced his shoes and stood, the trousers were far too long; but, bending, he tugged at the ends, and there came to M. Faure's ears two little ripping sounds as the stranger held up for the advocate's inspection the strips of material that had been taken from either leg. Opening the bag which he had reconstructed from the umbrella, he dropped inside it the false soles and heels, the inner soles and the two strips of material, and closed it again; then stooping, he turned up his trousers ends, giving them immaculate cuffs. When once more he stood erect he was five inches

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shorter than when he came in and his pants, beneath his topcoat, were the right length for his new height.

"My dear sir," M. Faure blurted out, petulantly, "this is all very interesting but I find I am unable to concentrate while manacled in this fashion. Will you kindly oblige me by unlocking these things?"

"Of course," the stranger said blandly, "but first here is something which will pique your interest." From his side pocket he drew a small red handkerchief. Dampening it from the water bottle on M. Faure's desk, he began to rub his cheeks. Presently the unhealthy spots of color disappeared, the cheeks on either side of the black beard became cadaverous, and the whole face, the advocate thought with a shock, suddenly turned evil.

"The color does not show when wiped off with such a handkerchief," his visitor said, dropping it into the open bag. "Even blood would be camouflaged against such a background."

Monsieur Faure shook his manacled wrists. "I must insist . . ." he began, but the man held up a protesting hand.

"All in good time," he promised. "In but a few minutes now, if you have not found the trick of it, I will release you. Meanwhile, this is something that should excite your curiosity." Watching his image in a mirror on the wall, very gently he began peeling off his black beard.

Beads of perspiration glistened on the advocate's forehead. If, before, he had wished none should see him in his present plight, now he ardently desired some unexpected caller. Till the stranger had locked the door, he had been fearful, despite his uneasiness, of making himself ridiculous. A fine figure of fun he would have made among his legal colleagues if it became known that he had allowed himself to be manacled in his own apartment by a harmless lunatic. It was the sort of thing a man might never live down. Now, as the stranger removed his beard, M. Faure was seriously thinking of calling for help. He remembered with a little flutter of the heart that, probably, no one would hear him. Madame Feuille below caught the 9:05 bus for the Avenue Clichy as regularly as clockwork. She had some sort of job in a night club. And the couple in the apartment above spent three nights each week playing bridge with fellow enthusiasts at the Café Colette — Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. And this was Thursday! To be sure, he could rise and rush for the door, but apart from the unseemliness of such a retreat from his own office, M. Faure told himself such action might arouse the ire of the lunatic. The moods of the insane changed, he had heard, with lightning rapidity. Any sense of frustration the man might feel would probably result in dire consequences for himself while he was struggling, manacled, to get the door open. No, he couldn't risk it. He said instead, with as much authority as he could muster, "All this is most fascinating, but I must *insist*, m'sieur."

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"In three minutes or less," the man promised, and M. Faure fancied he could detect a new note in his voice. With alarm he realized that the fellow was becoming excited. He was now facing the advocate and removing the wispy eyebrows and black, straggly wig. The hair beneath was gray. He picked up the absurd hat he had worn and removed the gaudy band; then, thrusting his hand inside, he tugged on a string and instantly the hat had changed both its shape and size. He placed it on his head carefully, setting it at an angle. The wig, the wisps of eyebrow, and the hat band he dropped into his bag and stood before M. Faure, his white-gloved hands hidden behind his back. The scarecrow which the advocate had admitted to his apartment had been metamorphosed into a well-dressed gentleman.

M. Faure gave a sickly grin. "Why, you're a magician."

"I was."

Somewhere in M. Faure's subconscious something was struggling for recognition. A man, a name, a situation. He said, "Are you someone I know?"

"Someone you have forgotten, perhaps." He was turning the white gloves inside out as he spoke. The operation complete, he donned them again and the advocate saw that they were now a good match for his hat and coat. From his side pocket he took a pair of glasses with gold rims and adjusted them to his eyes. His glance fell on M. Faure's silk muffler, hanging with the advocate's light overcoat from a hook on the wall. Taking it down, he drew it caressingly across his open hand. "Do you mind?"

M. Faure said, anxious for him to be off, "Use it by all means."

"That is kind of you, indeed," the man said. He was holding the muffler by either end, examining it, testing its strength. "It is really an excellent muffler."

"I am glad you like it," M. Faure managed to say. "And, now, like a good fellow, open these handcuffs."

"Of course, of *course*," the other said, as if he had forgotten, and moved toward the advocate, muffler in hand. He paused, shrugging. "But where is the key?"

"Don't be absurd," Faure said, now thoroughly frightened. "You palmed it. Surely you haven't forgotten?"

The man frowned. "No, no," he said. "Magicians don't forget; only advocates forget." He was leaning over M. Faure, gazing at him through his glasses, his eyes burning, and there was a sudden tenseness in his voice. The advocate shrank back in his chair. "Try and remember," the man said.

"Keep away!" M. Faure cried. "Don't come near me! Who are you?"

"I can't be very important since you have forgotten me." He sighed. "Is it possible that I should have had you in mind so often in the last years and you never gave me a thought?" His face came a little closer and the advocate strained away from him. "Please don't speak for a moment or you will never utter the name you are trying to recall. Let me call

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something to your mind, m'sieur — something perhaps of no great consequence to you at the time but of paramount importance to me." He showed all his teeth and it was almost with a snarl that he continued. "You permitted me to serve ten years in prison, m'sieur. I had very little money and no influence, and the fact that I was innocent probably counted little against that. My life and my honor were in the hands of my advocate. I'd put them there in all confidence. You should have come into court ready and eager to fight for my liberty, but you came muddled in thought, illogical, and almost incoherent in argument because the night before you had thought more of your greedy, sensual appetite than of the man you were to defend. In short, m'sieur, while I lay sleepless with anxiety, you were drunk. You *forgot* the defense. Your presence in court was a hindrance rather than a help. Well, M'sieur Faure, you probably forgot me before I was in my cell, but I have had ten years to remember you."

M. Faure's eyes were starting from his head. He said in a whisper, "Now I know you."

"One changes much in prison, especially when one is innocent. But you, too, shall change, M'sieur the Advocate, but more swiftly." With a deft and incredibly quick movement he thrust the silk muffler he held at M. Faure but, swift as he was, before the gag was in his mouth, the advocate had shouted, not for help, strangely enough, but a name. "*Georges Dumont*," he screamed.

He said no more, for there was a knee like a nob of iron against his chest and the gag had been cruelly tied. Whipping from his side pocket a thin cord, Dumont bound his victim to the chair.

It was in the moment when he was tugging the last knot taut that he heard the knock on the door. He strode quickly across the thick carpet and with his cheek against the panel, waited, listening. In a few moments the knock was repeated, timorously. *Whoever knocks must have heard Faure shout my name*, Dumont thought; *he is standing on the other side of the door, wondering.* Footsteps moved slowly, hesitantly, the listener imagined, across the hall and down the stairs.

Dumont thought rapidly. The man had only to cross the street and report what he had heard to the Chief of Police. He, Dumont, had spent ten years of horror, relieved only by the anticipation of ultimate triumph over the man who had failed him. He was not going to be robbed of victory. With sudden resolve he opened the door, standing so that no one could see into the room. There was a man on the stairs and already halfway to the floor below. He was standing still, looking up as though half inclined to retrace his steps, and Dumont saw at a glance that he was a person of little consequence and one who would react timidly to a show of authority. He beckoned, peremptorily. "Come, come, m'sieur," he said. "M'sieur Faure is now disengaged." Distantly a clock

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chimed the half-hour. In thirty minutes, he remembered, the advocate would have another caller.

The man on the stairs said nothing but turned and came slowly up, while Dumont waited just inside the half-open door, ready to close it as the other entered. Half a minute later he shut and locked the door almost with the one movement. The man had seen the bound and gagged figure of M. Faure. "*M'sieur*," he gasped, and no more. He was dead.

"It had to be," Dumont told himself. "I had no quarrel with him. I don't even know who he is. I hated doing it, but it was his life or mine." He looked at M. Faure, who, eyes staring with horror, was straining at his bonds, and then he was kinder than he had intended to be and killed him at once, using the discarded handle of the vanished umbrella which had grown to walking-stick length and from the end of which projected a razor-sharp blade already wet with the blood of a man he had never seen till that night.

He took from the bag the damp, red handkerchief he had used to remove the rouge from his face and wiped the bloodstained point of the stick, dropped the handkerchief back into the bag, and pressed the spring that made the point recede into the hollow of the stick. He took the gag from M. Faure's mouth and restored the silk muffler to the hook on the wall; then, removing the whipcord binding the body, he unlocked the handcuffs and dropped cord, handcuffs, and key into the bag. He looked about the room satisfying himself all was as he wished, telling himself that everything had gone according to plan with the exception that he had used M. Faure's muffler instead of the one he had brought. Yes, everything had gone according to plan — *except that he had killed two men instead of one.*

The thought displeased him and frowning down at the stranger's body, he poured himself a tumbler of water from the carafe and dropped into it a powder such as he had used at the Café Colette in the presence of the waiter, Charles. He was mechanically carrying out his preconceived plan but his mind was on the second victim, and it was almost absently that he murmured, "To your headaches, messieurs the police," and strewing over M. Faure's desk the paper clips from a small bowl, poured into it the contents of the glass.

Very carefully he closed the black bag, then picked it up and holding his walking-stick under his arm, fumbled for an instant with the lapel of his coat. The thing he removed he tossed at the feet of the dead advocate. Silently he unlocked the door, opened it the tiniest bit, peered out listening intently; then, satisfied, he stepped out quickly. This time as he went downstairs he made no sound.

Ten minutes later Dumont was seated at a table outside the Café Colette, his bag at his feet, his walking stick between his knees. He was peering through his spectacles at the news-

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paper he held, but he was thinking of the man who had called upon M. Faure so inopportunely. How strange, he thought, that he should have spent years of his life planning the death of a man who had wronged him and then, almost on the spur of the moment, killed another who had done him no harm.

He told himself he should be enjoying the full measure of his vengeance, not sentimentalizing over an interloper. There was no doubt the fellow had heard the shouted name, *Georges Dumont*. Perhaps it had awakened some memory. After all, no man went to prison for ten years without a little publicity. No, he had had to do it. If he hadn't, long since the fellow would have been pouring his story into the eager ears of the Chief of Police in the Rue Grenoir.

He asked the waiter, Charles, would he be so good as to get him an aspirin and Charles brought it, smiling at the recollection of the crazy one who had put a powder into his drink and poured it not into his mouth but into the gutter. He was still thinking of the absurdity of it when the tables began to buzz with news of the double murder. Setting a fresh cup of coffee before Georges Dumont, he was voluble.

"To think, m'sieur, I actually spoke with the murderer. At this very table. A tall, shabby fellow and a lunatic most veritably. Oh, there is no doubt about it! Many of us saw him and it is said that poor M. Faure, in his death struggle, tore from the villain's coat the imitation flower I myself saw him sniffing."

Dumont only half heard. Perhaps the poor devil who had knocked on the door had a family dependent upon him, he was thinking, and then, annoyed with himself, sought to excuse the man's murder with the old argument. "If I'd allowed him to go, I had also to let M. Faure escape." That was unthinkable. Since M. Faure had to die, the other also had to die. That was logical. His death had been necessary. Regrettable, but absolutely necessary.

And yet he knew that everything had been spoiled. He had come to the café to gloat. To hear them bring news of M. Faure's death and the manner of it. To listen, congratulating himself in his cleverness. Instead, he would hear about the other man — the innocent one — and he knew in his heart that from now on there was to be no peace, only a gnawing remorse that would fetter his freedom. Freedom? He'd never be free.

He heard himself asking the waiter, "But why? What was the reason for this crime?"

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "Some fancied grievance against M'sieur the advocate. Perhaps against all advocates, for when I am called as a witness I shall have to swear he imagined M. Faure a profligate of sixty, with red hair. Oh, yes, there is not the shadow of a doubt he had a bee in his bonnet about M. Faure. But, I ask you, m'sieur, what grievance could even a lunatic have against a poor stone-deaf creature like Jacques?"

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THE WITNESS

by PERCIVAL WILDE

As the truck bearing the motion-picture camera neared the scene of action, the natty young man in command addressed a few final words to his companions.

"Now, boys," he said, "every one of you knows what you've got to do. Do it, and do it right the first time."

They nodded silently.

The truck wheeled into a position where the camera could conveniently be focused on the imposing entrance of the Second National Bank. The noonday crowds halted as if by magic. Well-trained assistants split them neatly on either side of the field commanded by the lens.

"Action!" cried the natty young man. He began to turn the crank.

A portly business man passed through the revolving doors.

"Act as if you didn't see the camera!" cried the director.

He seized the situation at once, and obligingly entered into the spirit of the game.

An old man with a small, bulging satchel — the very picture of a trusted employee — passed through the doors. As he did so, three younger men hemmed him in.

"Go to it!" cried the director, turning the crank busily.

What followed was convincingly realistic.

The old man halted in dismay, clutching his satchel more tightly, while his right hand groped for his pistol. A fist caught him solidly under the chin. His weapon leaped into view, but a revolver in the hands of one of his assailants spoke first. There was a single, sharp report, and the old man collapsed to the pavement.

The crowd, multiplying rapidly, grinned its appreciation of the drama.

"Now, Joe," reminded the director, "the satchel."

It was torn from the quivering fingers.

The director cast a final glance upon the scene. "O.K.," he announced. The men who had played the rôles of assassins leaped on the truck. It was in motion instantly. It swung around the corner.

"Funny," commented one of the interested spectators, "they left one of their actors behind."

He pointed to the old man, lying motionless where he had fallen. Then he noticed a thin stream of blood, oozing from a hole drilled neatly through the old man's temple. . . .

"Come in, Cicoletti," invited Troon, the assistant district attorney, "come right in, and sit down. I want to talk over the Mackenzie case with you."

The gunman glared at the policemen who ranged themselves alertly at

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his side. His eyes sneered into those of his enemy.

"Well, what do you want?"

Troon pushed a little sheaf of papers toward him. "This is your confession," he announced agreeably. "I've got all the dope, and I've saved you the trouble of writing out your story. All I want is your signature."

Cicoletti's lip curled. "And how are you going to get that?"

Troon smiled. "I'm putting my cards on the table, Cicoletti. I know where you stole the truck. I know where you abandoned it."

"What does that prove?" demanded Cicoletti.

"Nothing — by itself," admitted Troon, "but I know more than that. I know where you stole the motion-picture camera. You left it in the truck. And here is a list of the men who took part in the crime."

Cicoletti glanced at it casually. "Who says they did? Here's Joe Gennaro's name, I see. I got witnesses to prove he was in Pittsburgh all week."

Troon held his ground. "I've got other witnesses who saw him shoot old man Mackenzie through the head."

"Witnesses?" echoed Cicoletti. "Witnesses? Well, who are the witnesses?"

There was no mistaking the threat. Bitter experience had taught Troon what to expect when his witnesses, placed upon the stand, gazed into the merciless faces of the men whom their testimony alone could convict. Memories would begin to fail; identifications, once positive, would become doubtful. There would be contradictions, recantations, withdrawn accusations — and acquittal for the defendants.

One witness, some months ago, had refused to be intimidated. His body, riddled with bullets, had been found in his own doorway a week later. Troon remembered the case well.

"You're thinking, aren't you, that once you know who they are, you'll see to it that they won't open their mouths? Yes, Cicoletti, that's what you're thinking! But this time you've left a witness who can't be bulldozed! You've left a witness who can't be intimidated! You've left a witness who saw just what happened, and who is going to tell it to the jury in the same way!"

Troon made a sign to one of the policemen, and the room was darkened. A square on the whitewashed wall facing them was suddenly illuminated.

Shapes and figures began to appear in the patch of light; the imposing entrance of the Second National Bank; the portly business man who had been the first to walk into the field of the lens; old man Mackenzie, clutching a small, bulging satchel.

Troon's voice cut through the darkness.

"Of course, you're not in the picture, Cicoletti. You couldn't be. But you left your fingerprints on the crank of the camera, and we photographed them."

But for the clicking of the projector and the gasping inhalations of the

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gunman, the room was silent.

Again Troon spoke:

"A really clever man would have made sure that the camera was unloaded. Somehow you overlooked that. There was film in it when you stole it. There was film in it when you cranked it. Cicoletti, you took this picture yourself."

The lights flashed on, to reveal the gunman, suddenly no longer natty, slumped in a heap in his chair.

"Here's your confession, Cicoletti," said Troon.

And Cicoletti signed on the dotted line.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN SUICIDES

by T. S. STRIBLING

WHEN Scargrave, reporter for the *Tiamara Times*, and a smallish gentleman entered our apartment, I knew at once they had come to consult Poggioli about the Jalatti tragedy. My reasoning was this: nobody visits my criminologist friend except about mysteries; as the Jalatti affair was the only local mystery in the morning paper, this visit had to be about that. I thought this was a rather snappy bit of deduction and mentioned it to Poggioli.

He seemed not impressed. He stood appraising our visitors a moment and then said, quite loudly enough for them to hear him, that he was surprised that these two men should call upon him together. I knew no reason why they should not come together and I am sure neither of them did either. Scargrave the reporter, who was always on the *qui vive* for a lead into a Poggioli interview, asked the criminologist's reason for making such a remark.

"Because you two want diametrically opposite solutions to Joe Jalatti's death," explained Poggioli, "and it is only ordinary prudence for men on opposite sides of a controversy to employ separate counselors."

None of us knew what he was talking about. Scargrave got out a pad of paper and asked why Poggioli supposed that he and his friend were on opposite sides of Jaletti's death, and how there *could* be opposite sides to such a matter?

"You want to prove Jalatti was murdered and your friend wants to prove him a suicide," said the psychologist.

The reporter opened his mouth to say something, but obviously changed his mind, for he asked a little bewildered, "How did you know Mr. Wilks wanted to prove Jalatti a suicide?"

"Because I can see he has come here on a business mission. He shows no emotional disturbance whatever; his relation to the dead man is obviously one of property. Now the simplest property relation between a business executive and a dead man is life insurance. Could be something else, but life insurance is most likely. Mr. Wilks

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is an adjuster, an insurance claim agent. The only point he could possibly want to know is whether Jalatti killed himself or was murdered. Jalatti's policy is evidently of the type voided by suicide. So he wants Jalatti's death proved a suicide in order to save his company money."

Both our visitors gave the brief laugh of surprise and admiration that usually follows one of my friend's *tours de force.*

"And why do I want him murdered?" asked Scargrave.

"Because you are a newspaper man. Murder is more dramatic than suicide — it's front-page stuff."

Scargrave gave an odd little twist of a smile.

"No-o," he said slowly, "I'm on Wilks' side. I also want you to prove Jalatti's death a suicide."

I was amazed. On impulse I blurted out the very indiscreet sentence, "Surely the gangsters haven't bribed the . . ." and there I stopped.

Scargrave turned to me with more dignity than I thought he possessed. "No, the gangsters haven't bribed the *Times.* Quite the opposite: this is for the advancement of the public welfare."

Poggioli pondered, then looked at the reporter attentively. "You don't mean the murder was . . . for the public welfare?"

Scargrave laughed a little ruefully. "No, no, not at all. I know the public in general regards these intra-gang killings as good riddance of bad rubbish. I mean the shift from murder to suicide is for a great public good. And that's why I've come to you: to prove, if possible, that this murder was suicide . . . for the public good."

Poggioli nodded slowly. "I see . . . I see . . . but I've never before deliberately twisted the evidence in foul play, Mr. Scargrave."

"Listen, I don't ask you to twist it. All I ask is that you come along and give me any evidence or suggestion of suicide — and murder too, if you like — and let me publish what I please . . . for the good of our state."

Poggioli tapped the table reflectively. "Very well . . . I'll give the *Times* my complete analysis." And the four of us started for the street.

Well, I can hardly express my perturbation at such a bargain struck before my eyes with my hitherto immaculate friend. "Poggioli," I exclaimed, "how can covering up a murder be for the public good?"

My old friend turned and was about to explain when Scargrave interrupted. "You'll treat my information as a privileged communication between client and counsel?"

"Certainly, if you put it that way," said Poggioli. So the four of us walked on out into the street and I learned nothing more of the strange point.

We hailed a cab and Scargrave directed us to the Ritz Hotel. I sat in the front seat with the driver and kept looking around at the three men in the back, wondering what earthly cause could have persuaded Poggioli to falsify murder. Presently he misconstrued my looking back, for he said,

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"You want to tell me we are being followed. I am aware of it. I have been noticing it in the mirror."

Now, I hadn't meant that at all. I never look to see who's following me; I never suppose anybody is following me. But I had no chance to explain this. The news excited our visitors. They turned around and began staring out the back window. Scargrave asked which one it was. Poggioli said the Cadillac. Scargrave asked why Poggioli thought that fellow was following us.

"Because he stops behind us at red lights, which is the place a car like that always passes a car like this."

"Cadillac," repeated Scargrave, "that could easily be Boni's car."

"You mean the murderer?" asked Poggioli.

"I am sure it's his car," said the reporter. "Boni's the czar of illegal gambling in Tiamara, and Jalatti was muscling into his field. Yes, that looks like Boni's car and the driver looks like Boni himself."

"Look here," I suggested nervously, "our jalopy can't lose a car like that. Why don't we slow down and see if he passes, or stops, or what?"

Scargrave nodded and instructed our driver to pull up to the curb.

We had no sooner stopped than the big car was slowed up beside us. A small, impassive man called out to ask if this were Professor Poggioli's cab. The insurance man said it was. The motorist handed something across to me in the front seat, "May I ask Professor Poggioli to read this carefully." With that he placed an envelope in my hand, and drove away.

I think we were all glad to see him go. The insurance man asked what was in the letter, as I handed it to Poggioli. I said I didn't know. Scargrave guessed it would contain a five or ten thousand dollar bill. There is a certain suspense even in watching such a communication opened, but when Poggioli tore open the envelope, no money dropped out — just a note.

Scargrave said, "I hope your professional ethics won't keep you from letting us know what he wrote?"

The criminologist finished the missive, then lowered it thoughtfully. "No . . . no . . . under the circumstances I feel justified in showing this communication. It's an attempt to deceive me. It isn't the honest effort a criminal makes when he goes to a lawyer for protection."

We were amazed at the audacity of the Cadillac driver. I even laughed at the imbecility of anyone trying to deceive Poggioli. Scargrave asked the nature of the deception.

"Very simple," said Poggioli, "this is really an admission of Jalatti's murder, but on the surface it denies it. The fellow evidently didn't realize that a murderer can't write a denial of his crime and not fail to include incriminating phrases which actually admit his guilt. You see, the trouble is," went on Poggioli, falling into one of his academic moods, "a written statement more or less divulges what is really in the writer's mind. There is no way for the writer to avoid it.

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The writer will be too blunt, or too diffuse, or go too far around a point, or cut across it too sharply — in other words, he can never write his denial naturally. All criminals should have lawyers for secretaries and put all their correspondence in strictly legal forms."

Scargrave begged him to read the letter.

"Very well, and as I read I want you gentlemen to be on the alert for critical phrases revealing murder, just as a check on my own deductions."

Naturally, that put us on guard and we listened with minute attention as Poggioli read the following note:

Dear Dr. Poggioli,

May I, as an admirer of your criminological skill, request your investigation of the death of Joseph Jalatti at the Ritz Hotel on Tiamara Beach. I ask you to check the details of this tragedy carefully and I feel you will reach a verdict of suicide. What details you will find I have no idea, but I am sure they will be something the police and the detectives would never observe.

Your sincere admirer,

Henry Boni

The three of us looked at each other and then at Poggioli. I broke the silence by saying, "I don't see a word in that to convict him. In fact, if he weren't innocent he never would have dared to invite you to the scene of the crime."

"I am going to quote this note in my story," said Scargrave, "and let my readers draw their own conclusions."

"That probably was Boni's idea," observed the criminologist drily.

"What is your explanation, Professor Poggioli?" asked the insurance man a little anxiously.

"I quote from the note," began Poggioli academically. " 'What details you will find I have no idea, but I am sure they will be something the police and the detectives will never observe.' Why should anyone make a remark like that?"

This, of course, was a rhetorical question but the insurance man was so on edge that he answered, "Because he has read stories about you, Professor Poggioli, and you always — at least, in the stories — find out things in the most extraordinary manner." And Mr. Wilks' voice was a plea, begging Poggioli to do that again.

"But those instances were murders," snorted the psychologist. "A suicide — why, that's written all over the place! It doesn't take a microscope to see an elephant track! But suppose we get on to the Ritz and see what delicate and subtle clues our gentleman has contrived to make a murder look like suicide."

The Jalatti apartment was in the penthouse of the Ritz. We went up in a private elevator which landed us on a tiny platform where we had to press a bell and be examined through a peep-hole before we were admitted to the penthouse proper.

A ghost of a woman did this peeping and when she let us in, she went back to a table and sat down and put her head in her hands. This was so tragic and touching that only after several moments did I observe a dead man on the floor with an automatic

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near his hand. Then I glanced about for other details; a huge window which gave on the ocean had a bullet hole in its upper half; a modernistic painting on the south wall resembled the woman at the table in a vague sort of way. There were many other things in the room but I mention only these three because later on they turned out to be clues, and I am putting them down for what they are worth. Naturally they told me nothing.

The insurance man seemed fascinated by the woman. He touched my arm and whispered, "If she can prove her husband was murdered, she will collect a quarter of a million from my company." I made no reply.

Scargrave acted as spokesman. He began by extending his sympathy, then said he was from the *Times* and his paper wanted to know the facts of the tragedy. The woman looked up in a dazed fashion and said that Boni had done it.

"You didn't see him do it, did you?" asked the reporter.

"No, I was in there." She pointed to a bedroom door.

"Then how do you know it was Boni and not someone else?"

"Because when we heard the bell, Joe looked through the peep-hole and nodded it was Boni and motioned me to go into the bedroom."

"Then you didn't actually see Boni when he came in, or while he was here, or when he went out?"

"No."

"And your husband didn't *say* anything to you — just motioned?"

She nodded.

"How can you be sure your husband meant Boni?"

The woman's face grew a shade paler. "Because that's the way Boni works. First he telephones . . . then he sends a man . . . then he comes himself." There was something grisly in the way she uttered this last phrase.

"Then you and your husband were *expecting* violence?" I suggested.

"I was, he wasn't."

"What had you done to arouse Boni's anger?" I asked.

"We'd muscled in on his racket."

When I inquired what racket, she seemed surprised at my ignorance.

"Why, the gambling racket! Joe put in a casino and fixed it up with the city police and the county officers. We paid off everybody we were supposed to. Then Boni cut in and telephoned Joe to bring him seventy-five per cent of our take. I thought we'd better do it, but Joe told him to come and get it, if he could."

Such a percentage shocked me. Apparently the racketeers were no more considerate of each other than business men. "What happened then?" I asked. "Is that why he came?"

"No, he sent a man over who asked for eighty-five per cent, and I told Joe he'd better pay it and then try to get it lowered, but he said no, he wouldn't, we were in the South."

"What has the South got to do with it?" I asked, puzzled.

"Why, it was our first trip down here," said the woman, with a spark of withered resentment. "We'd read

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in the papers that the gangsters didn't kill each other in the South, that they carried their feuds back North and killed each other up there. Joe figured we would just stay in the South and not go back North at all. That's why we fixed up this penthouse like it is . . . and he's lying there on the floor."

Seeing I understood none of this, Scargrave said in an undertone to me, "The papers here did play up one instance of Tiamara gang feuds being settled in the North. It was part of our public policy."

I remembered the headlines from the previous tourist season, but before I could dig into his reference to "public policy," Poggioli took over the questioning.

"Did you hear their conversation from your bedroom, Mrs. Jalatti?"

"No, when we leased this apartment, Joe had it sound-proofed."

As Scargrave wrote this down quickly, he exclaimed, "So you didn't even hear the shot fired!"

The wife gave a brief, shaken nod. "I could hear that."

Poggioli asked, "And you rushed in and saw your husband lying here on . . ."

Mrs. Jalatti gave a little gasp. "I — didn't rush in."

The criminologist looked at her carefully. "Were you afraid?"

She shook her head in silence.

Poggioli brightened. "Oh, I see — you thought your husband had killed Boni! You didn't go in because you wanted to give him a chance to clear the room before you entered!"

Scargrave began writing rapidly again. Presently the reporter paused to ask, "Mrs. Jalatti, how long did you wait after you heard the shot — *before* you entered this room?"

She said ten or fifteen minutes.

"And how long did you wait in your bedroom after the unknown man came up the elevator — *before* you heard the shot?"

I did not know why the reporter reversed the time element like this, and neither did the woman, for she replied in weary bewilderment, "Oh, I don't know. Maybe thirty minutes."

Scargrave pointed his pencil at her. "Then Boni, if it was Boni, had plenty of time to go back down the elevator and get out of the building — *before* you heard the shot?"

The widow looked at Scargrave antagonistically. "You are not trying to make out my Joe killed himself?"

"No, no, not at all. I am simply trying to get the facts."

"Of course, he had time — but my Joe didn't kill himself."

"That's all I wanted to know."

The wife seemed quite shaken at the possibility. The insurance man went over to her and told her that no matter what the papers printed, it would have no influence on the settlement of Jalatti's life insurance policy. He then suggested that she go into the bedroom, lie down, and try to rest. This seemed to me commendably neutral on Wilks' part, since he was trying to rob her with one hand and assist her with the other. Mrs. Jalatti

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swayed as she rose from the table. Wilks took her arm, assisted her into the bedroom, and softly closed the door behind them.

I will admit I had a bad taste in my mouth, realizing that all three of these men were working with all the professional skill at their disposal to prove Jalatti's murder a suicide. They wound a machination of words around the widow, like spiders webbing a fly. I could not understand at all how public policy entered the case, but of one thing I was sure: the three were out to cheat the widow of a quarter of a million dollars.

After Mrs. Jalatti and the insurance man had gone, Scargrave cleared his throat ruefully and said, "I suppose it must have been murder — couldn't very well have been anything else." To this Poggioli's silence acquiesced, then the reporter went on with business-like briskness, "Well, you are here, Professor Poggioli, to ferret out the smallest suggestions of suicide. . . ."

"Clues of suicide which Boni arranged for us to find, and about which he wrote us the note— in case we miss them altogether," agreed Poggioli ironically.

"I suppose that's the size of it," agreed the reporter. "Now let's find them and I'll play them up in my story."

I can at least say for these men that neither of them had any appetite for the job. Still, they went to work systematically to aid and abet some hypothetical "public welfare" which I did not understand.

As for clues, they were practically nonexistent. I've already given you three — the body on the floor, the hole in the window, and the modernistic portrait on the wall of the dead man's wife. It was Poggioli's task to twist these innocent details into a refutation of murder and a proof of suicide. Under the circumstances I could not even know whether my friend was sincere in his deductions or whether he was weaving a required theory out of a vacuum. It was very simple and can be told briefly:

The police had developed the fingerprints on the handle of the automatic. They were the dead man's fingerprints. Scargrave wrote this down. But Poggioli pointed out that these prints were blurred, as if someone had pressed Jalatti's fingers against the pistol butt after Jalatti was dead; so the fingerprints themselves were an indirect proof that the dead man was murdered. Scargrave did not write that down.

The other clue — the bullet hole high up in the window pane — was of the same tenor. Poggioli looked at this with the appreciation of an expert appraising the work of an amateur.

"This is not so bad as the fingerprints," he said. "Notice the bullet hole is three or four feet *above* the level of Jalatti's head. Now, it is a fact that suicides, when shooting themselves, always train their bullets upwards, whereas murderers level their guns — aim at your own head, then at something else, and you'll see what I mean." Both Scargrave and I panto-

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mimed and we saw the psychologist's point. Poggioli went on not without a touch of admiration for the murderer, "It's amazing that Boni hit on so delicate a proof of suicide and was cool enough to carry it out. He must be an expert in his way, he must have killed dozens of men. I understand now why he wrote me a note asking me to look for and admire the artistry of his job."

Scargrave wrote rapidly at this and nodded his head with satisfaction. "Maybe Jalatti really did kill himself and I'm writing an honest story after all," he said wishfully.

Poggioli shrugged. "Unhappily, Scargrave, in this particular instance it is an absolute proof of murder."

"But how can it be, when it's a proof of suicide?"

"It isn't a proof of suicide, it is a proof of great cunning in the killer — but not quite enough cunning. You see, the trouble with concealment of murder is this: it is still murder in the killer's heart and thoughts. All traces left in matter must eventually expose the actual psychology of the person who leaves them. In other words, in this case the murderer has left not the concealed traces, but the traces of his *effort to conceal them*."

In a spot like this we naturally didn't want a lecture. So Scargrave flung out, "What's wrong with the hole in that window?"

"It's in the wrong place," said Poggioli, "it doesn't belong in the window."

"Wrong place how?" demanded the newspaperman.

"If Jalatti had been alone in the room and shot himself, the bullet from his automatic would have lodged either in the right wall or the left, according to whether he was right-handed or left-handed; but it would never have gone through the window facing the sea."

"But why do you say that?" cried Scargrave in frustration.

"Because a suicide, in destroying himself, always fixes his last look on the light, the sky, the world he is leaving. He would have been staring through the window at the ocean and his bullet would therefore have lodged in one of the walls."

Scargrave glanced about for some counter-argument. "He could have faced his wife's portrait," he offered, pointing to the picture on the wall.

Poggioli shook his head. "Quite the reverse," he said. "That is a modernistic portrait. All modernistic painting is an unconscious effort to flee a despised reality. Husbands order modernistic portraits of their wives as an escape and to revenge themselves for having to live with the original. This is all unconscious, of course, but it would effectually prevent a husband from turning *toward* his wife's portrait when he killed himself. He *would* have turned away from it."

Scargrave twiddled his pencil nervously. "That's much too deep for the readers of the *Tiamara Times*. I'll just say that Jalatti did face the portrait of his wife when he killed himself — that will give the story a sympathetic

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touch and appeal to the public."

At this moment the bedroom door opened and the insurance man entered the living room.

"She's asleep," he said, in the tone one uses when an invalid is at rest. "A terrific strain is off her mind. How did the examination come out — murder or suicide?"

"Suicide," said Scargrave.

"Murder," said Poggioli.

The insurance agent said sharply, "Of course, it was really murder! All of us know that."

Scargrave widened his eyes at Wilks' change of front.

"We know nothing of the sort. Every detail shows it was suicide. See that bullet hole in the window! See those fingerprints on the automatic! See this picture of the man's wife! They all spell suicide!"

The insurance man was bewildered, and Scargrave explained the suicide theory earnestly.

Wilks turned to Poggioli. "But you, Professor, said they meant murder!"

"Do you *want* them to be murder?" cried Scargrave.

"Yes, I do," declared the agent.

"What's come over you? What's changed you?" And even I was as bewildered as the reporter.

"I'll tell you," stated the insurance man with righteousness, "I got to thinking in there about us men cheating that woman out of a quarter of a million dollars, and I decided . . . I decided I wouldn't be a party to it!"

I couldn't repress myself. "Good!" I cried. "I'm glad one man in this crowd has got a conscience!"

Poggioli wiped the ghost of a smile from his lips with his tongue. "You talked to Mrs. Jalatti — before she went to sleep?"

"Certainly," said Wilks, belligerently.

"You eased her mind . . . on financial questions? That's why she went to sleep, isn't it?"

Wilks said, "I don't know what you mean, Professor Poggioli," in a tone that showed he did.

"It's a pleasure to explain it," said Poggioli, with his ghost of a smile showing again. "You sold Mrs. Jalatti a large life insurance policy contingent upon collecting her husband's insurance. So now you want him to have been murdered."

Wilks started to speak, then didn't; began again and said, "You say the proof here shows murder. Will you please explain that to me?"

The criminologist dismissed the fact that Wilks had changed horses midstream and explained very clearly his interpretation of the fingerprints, the bullet hole, and the portrait.

"Is that all?" asked the insurance man in quite an unsatisfied voice.

"That's all. We need nothing more. That's conclusive — he was murdered."

"It may be conclusive to you, but that kind of proof won't stand up for a minute in a court of law. She couldn't collect thirty cents on that!"

"Mm-m. . . . That's the proof, that's all there is."

"Well, it won't do! We've got to get some *solid* proof." Wilks shook his

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ist to show how solid. He began moving about the apartment, looking here and there, evidently seeking a more patent proof of murder.

As I was in sympathy with him anyway, I watched him and wished him well, but I knew it was hopeless. How could any mortal man hope to wipe Henry Poggioli's eye? To my knowledge no clue had ever escaped him; no crime had ever eluded his analysis. I felt sorry for Wilks, even if his motive was purely mercenary.

However, the insurance adjuster made his inspection with a certain professional touch. He evidently had done this sort of thing before. In his orbit he picked up the automatic and examined it minutely. As the fingerprints already had been developed, I wondered what he was after. He studied the firearm, turned it bottom side up and looked at it, then walked across the room to a telephone, with the gun in his hand. He gave the dial a single flip, got Information, and asked the number of the County Courthouse. I lifted my brows at Poggioli to inquire what all this meant. In a low tone Poggioli said to me, "He's calling the firearms register at the County Courthouse to see if the automatic has been registered."

"Oh, yes," I whispered, and then the absurdity of the idea — that a Northern gangster would come South and *register* his gun — struck me forcibly. I didn't laugh. It was too grotesque.

"If he should find the gun registered," whispered Poggioli, "he will be completely undone."

"Why?" inquired Scargrave.

"Because the only racketeer in town who hoped for a peaceful life in Tiamara was Jalatti. Since he believed feuds were not fought in the South, he might possibly have registered his gun and decided to become a law-abiding citizen, more or less."

At this point the insurance man began speaking in the telephone.

"Will you please connect me with the register of small arms? . . . Hello, is this the department where citizens register their guns? . . . World Insurance Company speaking: will you see if you have on your registry a Colt's thirty-eight automatic, No. 856743, and give me the name of the owner. . . . Yes, I'll hold the phone."

Scargrave wet his lips with his tongue, stepped over and touched Wilks on the shoulder. "Look here, if that gun's registered by Boni, it would absolutely prove murder!"

"Sure. . . . That's what I want," replied Wilks, without looking around.

"But listen, you can't take that chance! As a citizen of this state you can't afford to prove this is murder!"

"Why can't I, as a citizen of this state?" With the phone to his ear, Wilks turned and looked at Scargrave.

The newspaperman studied him a moment. "It's hard to tell in a breath, but . . . but the finances of this state depend in a large part on horse racing, dog racing, jai alai, all of which have been legitimatized, and these taper off into hotel bookmakers, gambling casinos, numbers racket, honky-

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tonks, which have not been legitimatized, and they are all cogged in together —"

"Everybody knows that," said the insurance man.

"I know they do, but here's the point: As long as the state has its income and crime doesn't appear too bad, the people will stand for it — it's good business. But if murder happens too often, the people will start a house-cleaning. They'll tear down our whole financial structure — schools, hospitals, roads — why, we'll have to put on a sales tax, and a state income tax. It'll scare off tourists . . ."

"What am I supposed to do about that?" snapped the insurance man.

"Hang up that phone. Let this go as suicide. Don't take the risk it's Boni's gun and therefore murder!"

"But I'll get a fifty thousand dollar commission —"

"All right, what would you do if you got fifty thousand and ruined your state?"

"I'd move to another state. . . . Hello, hello. . . . Yes, this is the World Insurance Company. . . . You've found it? Well, who's the owner? . . . Jalatti. . . . *Joseph G. Jalatti!*" And he replaced shakily the instrument in its fork.

Scargrave flung out in amazement, and relief, "It really was a suicide!"

"This contradicts your theory, doesn't it, Poggioli?" I said, with a certain pleasure of my own.

"Seems to," answered the criminologist briefly.

"Seems to!" cried the insurance man hotly. "What are your fantastic proofs of murder compared with this?"

"Still valid, still irrefutable," snapped Poggioli. "It's this suicide that is fantastic. It's motiveless. Jalatti had dug in here, to live permanently. Then to kill himself? Impossible!"

Wilks said he was going to get another investigator, one not so theoretical and rarefied as Poggioli, an honest flat-footed investigator who would prove this murder was a murder if it was the last act he committed on earth.

The four of us rode down the elevator together, in no pleasant temper; then we separated and went our ways. As Poggioli and I taxied back home he said to me, "I knew those men, whose interests were diametrically opposed, shouldn't have come to the same counselor." The fact that he had interpreted both of them incorrectly didn't seem to disturb him.

The drama, I must say, stuck in my head for days. It was so inconclusive. I couldn't figure out what had really happened. Then one morning the whole mystery was opened afresh by my morning paper. I picked it up on our lawn and ran to Poggioli at the breakfast table. "Look at these headlines!" I cried.

Tecumseh Sherman Wilks, Tiamara Manager World Insurance Company, Kills Himself. . . . Legal Bar to Payment of ex-Gangster's Quarter Million Dollar Policy Led to Deed. . . . Slew Himself in Company's Office. . . . Used His Own Smith and Wesson."

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I can hardly describe my shock. "What do you know about that?" I ejaculated. "Killed himself over losing a commission!"

Poggioli dropped his hands on the table. "So that's the explanation . . . Heavens, how simple . . . Why didn't I think of it at the Ritz and save the poor devil's life!"

I said, "Poggioli, what do you mean? These headlines don't explain a thing."

He leaped up from the table and started for the street. "Come along," he snapped, "you'll see it in time, even you. . . . So that was what Boni's note directed me to discover . . . all the subtle clues of suicide must have been accidents . . ." Poggioli made a sharp gesture.

Outside we took a taxi. I asked if we were going to the insurance company's offices. My companion was annoyed. He said certainly not, we were going to the County Courthouse.

I cried, "Poggioli, this has upset you! You are crazy! You have to go look at the dead man to find out what killed him!"

We went on to the County Courthouse, went up to the seventh floor where firearms are registered. An official lounged behind a desk. Poggioli went to him, spread the paper, rapped the headlines.

"Look at that! Mr. Wilks registered his gun in your office only a few days before he died, didn't he?"

The man became defensive at once. "How do I know who registered what when — my memory's not a filing-card system!"

Poggioli pointed his finger. "You remember perfectly or you wouldn't answer like that!"

The fellow backwatered a trifle. "Maybe I do — three days ago, I believe." Then with a return of spirit, "What of it?"

"What of it? Just this. I think you are an accomplice in the murder. Jalatti, who was supposed to have killed himself a week or so ago — he registered his gun in your office a few days before his death too, didn't he?"

The man was obviously frightened now. He wet his lips with his tongue, "T-Two days before, I believe."

"And all the other five suicides before Jalatti — they all registered their pistols a day or so in advance — and then killed themselves?"

The clerk opened his mouth, then closed it. Finally he stammered, "One — one actually did kill himself."

"Don't you realize you are an accessory to murder when you permit a gangster or racketeer to enter your office, register a firearm *in another man's name,* then go out and shoot the man with the same gun, leave it on the spot, making each murder look like suicide? Don't you realize you are an accomplice?"

The man started to get up, then sat down again. "Well, I . . . we thought . . . so long as they were killing each other . . . it was good riddance . . . but now that they've begin to shoot respectable Southern business men . . . Still, if we make a fuss it'll upset the whole system. . . . We don't know *what* to do!"

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THE ADVENTURES OF KARMESIN

by GERALD KERSH

5. KARMESIN, BANK ROBBER

I NEVER appreciated arithmetical progression until, in Busto's apartment house, I learned how tea three times infused becomes intolerably weak, and how cigarette ends twice rolled grow unbearably strong. I may have learned a little geometry at school, but I had to struggle with Busto's blankets before I realized how ridiculously incongruous two rectangles can be, and I had to sleep on one of Busto's beds before I got to know the difference between looking at an angle and lying on one.

In short, I completed my education in Busto's apartment house. The physics of cold and darkness became as an open book to me; I picked up zoology without a tutor — I studied it by matchlight, with nothing but a thumbnail for a scalpel; and Karmesin taught me how to rob a bank.

I wish you could have met that powerful personality, that immense old man with his air of shattered magnificence. I see again his looming chest and unfathomable abdomen, still excellently dressed in a suit of sound blue serge; the strong cropped skull and the massive purple face; the tattered white eyebrows and the heavy, yellowish eyes, as large as little plums; the vast Nietzsche mustache, light brown with tobacco smoke, which lay beneath his nose like a hibernating squirrel, concealing his mouth, and stirring like a living thing as he breathed upon it.

And what was Karmesin?

If the things he told me were true, he must have been the greatest criminal of all time. If they were not, then he must have been the greatest liar of all time.

He was one of these two things — which one, I have never been able to determine.

"The fact is, I have what you would call a creative mind," said Karmesin.

"A remarkable talent for fiction?" I suggested.

"That is quite right. I have conceived many crime stories, and then made them come true. There is money to be made out of such fiction. Why are there no detective-story writers who are successful criminals? Simply because they are too nervous. My energy was colossal; but to be a writer, it is necessary to be lazy."

"And so you really have committed perfect crimes?"

"I have already said so."

"I've been told that there's no such thing."

"Yes, I know. The little slip that brings the criminal to justice. That was invented by writers. Why *should*

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one make a little slip? I never did."

"Never?"

"I have never pandered to the traditionalists. I have never been so obliging as to knock cigar ash all over the floor, or to trample on the flower beds with peculiar boots. *Pfui!* I once made a slight miscalculation, but never a slip."

"Then the crime couldn't have been perfect."

"On the contrary, it was. The slight miscalculation had nothing to do with the actual crime, which was quite neat and beautiful. But it was a lesson to me. I have kept every documentary evidence of that crime, in order to check any possible excess of exuberance in subsequent moments of triumph."

Karmesin fumbled in an inside pocket, and took out an ancient passbook, dated 1910, stamped with the imprint of Lombard's Bank, and inscribed with the name of Ivan Jovanovitch. His fingers flicked over the pages. He pointed to the last entry, indicating a credit balance of over three thousand pounds.

"You will observe, my friend, that a M. Jovanovitch had three thousand pounds to his credit in Lombard's Bank."

"Yes?"

"I was Jovanovitch."

"Your savings?"

"Endeavor not to be stupid. I am now telling you the story of a perfect bank robbery. In a few months one may show a profit of fifteen thousand pounds. It is a profitable side-line."

"Did you work it?"

"Need you ask? I will tell you the procedure. I arrived in England in January 1910. My name, for the time being, was Jovanovitch. My passport said so. I was a merchant, you understand, with excellent references, dealing in Eastern European commodities. I took an expensive suite of offices in a very good part of the City, and settled down to do business."

"And did you really do business?"

"Yes, why not? Do you think that one has to behave like Sherlock Holmes, and other rabble, and slink through back alleys with a crafty look on the face? Is it essential to go about like a fictitious financier, with cigars and gardenias — *chort vozmi!* — and other trinkets? Yes, I imported tobacco from the Balkans. There is good honest profit in Serbian tobacco. I also opened this current account at Lombard's Bank. I deposited three thousand pounds. For over six months I carried on my legitimate business. I received checks from well-known firms and paid them into my account. I withdrew sums of money. Sometimes, they rose to four thousand. In general, however, I kept a steady cash balance of three thousand pounds — but you must already have guessed my plans?"

"I assure you I haven't the faintest idea."

"Ha! And these are the people who set themselves up as critics! *Ekh!*"

"Well, after six months, what happened?"

"At this point it became necessary

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to enlist the services of three collaborators. They were men I knew very well; three Central Europeans named Lajos, Hundyadi, and Kovacs — I do not think that Kovacs was his real name, but that is of no consequence. I put my proposition to them. I asked them if they would care to earn two hundred pounds each — two hundred pounds was a lot of money. I need scarcely say that they saw eye to eye with me. Then, when everything was ready, I went to Lombard's Bank and asked to see the manager."

Karmesin paused.

"Well?" I said.

"Do you mean to say that you still fail to see my idea?"

"I do."

"And yet it is so childishly simple."

"Well, you went to see the manager . . ."

"Yes. You observed, on my passbook, that my branch of the bank was the Fleet Street Branch, which is one of the busiest branches of Lombard's Bank. You have, no doubt, seen the inside of it, if only from a distance. It is as large as the main entrance to a big railway station. A dozen tellers work at a huge counter, which goes round in a curve, not unlike a racetrack. Bear this is mind. Well, as I was saying, I arranged to see the manager, and I met that very busy gentleman in his office.

"I said to him: 'Forgive me if I use a little of your valuable time, but I have a rather unusual request to make.'

"'What is that, Mr. Jovanovitch?'

"'I have opened certain negotiations with the firm of *Leduc et Cie.* It is absolutely essential that I keep on good terms with them.'

"'Yes?'

"'I have to make a cash payment to them of five thousand pounds.'

"'Oh, but —'

"'Oh, don't be alarmed,' I said, 'I know that I have only three thousand pounds at present deposited with you. I have the other two thousand pounds with me, now.' And I took from my wallet banknotes to the value of two thousand pounds, and put them on the manager's desk.

"So that brought my credit to a total of five thousand pounds.

"Well, the manager looked at the notes, and at me, and he said:

"'I still don't quite see . . .'

"'My position,' I said, 'is this. It is absolutely essential that I convey to Leduc's agent an impression of financial solidity. I know I have enough to my credit to meet the check which they will present for payment on Friday morning. Is that so?'

"'Of course, Mr. Jovanovitch.'

"'Well, when their agent presents the check I want you to pay him the cash without hesitation, without delay. I do not want your clerks to look up my account. There must be no delay in the payment; no query; nothing at all of that sort. Can you arrange this for me?'

"'Well, Mr. Jovanovitch, it is a rather unusual request, but I see no reason why not.'

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"'Excellent. I should be very grateful if you would be so kind as to instruct your chief clerk to that effect now, in my presence,' I said. 'You will understand that this means a great deal to me, and it would set my mind at rest.'

"'Why, yes,' the manager said, and he called in the chief clerk, and gave him those instructions."

I looked at my boots to avoid Karmesin's searching glance.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" I said.

"Good God above! Can't you see? At precisely mid-day on Friday, at the busiest hour, I, carefully disguised, together with my three collaborators, each of us with an identical check for five thousand pounds, walked up to four clerks at convenient distances, along that enormous counter, and walked out together with twenty thousand pounds!"

"Magnificent!" I exclaimed.

"Boldness and simplicity were the keynotes of that little effort," said Karmesin, with a reminiscent smile.

"And what happened then?"

"Why, in two seconds we were in a motor-car which was waiting outside — *paf, paf!* We were gone. That was a perfect crime."

"But I seem to remember your mentioning a miscalculation," I said.

"*Da.* We reached a place a few miles out, at which we were to part. I took out three packets of small notes, and said: 'Here, boys: two hundred pounds each, as arranged. Now, let me have those banknotes.'

"You may imagine my astonishment when Kovacs took out a heavy revolver . . ."

Karmesin shrugged his shoulders so philosophically that a piece of plaster fell down from the ceiling.

"They got away with it?" I asked.

"Even my watch," said Karmesin, "but what can one do? One learns by one's mistakes. All the same, it was a pity. Twenty thousand pounds was a lot of money before the war."

And he burrowed into the mysterious hinterland of his gargantuan mustache for the last of a twopenny-packet of cigarettes.

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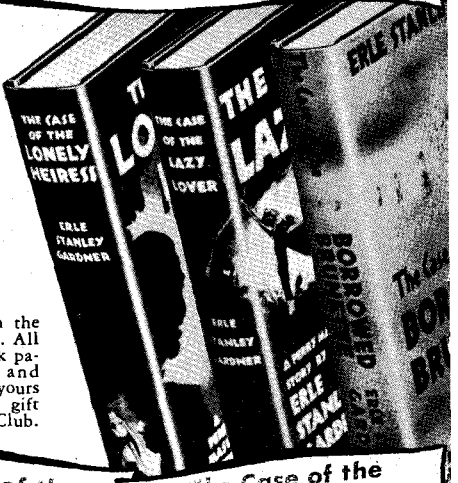

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